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The Grey Men of Empire: Framing Britain's Official Mind, 1854-1934

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“The Grey Men of Empire: Framing Britain’s Official Mind, 1854-1934”

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Abstract

“The Grey Men of Empire: Framing Britain’s Official Mind, 1854-1934,” examines the crucial, yet too often-undervalued role of Britain’s imperial bureaucracy in forging the ethos and identity behind the policy-decisions made across the Empire. Although historians have tended to dismiss them as the faceless and voiceless grey men of Empire, this study argues that the political officers of the Colonial Services represented the backbone of British colonial administration and, quite literally, were responsible for its survival and proliferation. These so-called ‘men on the spot’—the District Officers, Assistant District Officers, and Cadets of the C.S.—made innumerable day-to-day, minute-to-minute decisions free from the oversight of Government House and Whitehall. Rather than proving representative of their reputation as ‘grey men’, Britain’s district officers were colorful, opinionated, independent, influential, and exceedingly defiant. They were the products of Britain’s elitist public schools and universities, where their schoolmasters indoctrinated them with the belief that they were to be the next leaders of Britain and its Empire. The strict hierarchy of the school system taught boys how to exercise responsibility and authority, to embrace it, and to accept it as their lot in life. These were not the kind of individuals who sat quietly, pen in hand, waiting for orders. They were movers and doers; what their hands found to do, they did with all the confidence of someone who had been told from adolescence that it was their job to make decisions. Neutrality and impartiality were simply not in their nature. Such vibrancy easily translated to the Empire with profound results.

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
	Setting the Scene.....	15
	Structure.....	26
II.	Part I: Enslaving the Intellectual.....	28
	Gentlemanly Indoctrination and its Origins.....	40
	Not Scholars, but Men.....	53
	The Arnoldian Legacy.....	73
	The ‘Oxbridge’ Ethos.....	83
	The Fruits of the System.....	88
	Conclusion.....	108
III.	Part II: The Sons of Martha.....	111
	“Seven Days from my Chief”.....	148
	“Of Jobs and Dead Men’s Shoes”.....	169
	Conclusion.....	204
IV.	Part III: <i>Si monumentum requires circumspice</i>	207
	The Imperial ‘Other’.....	210
	The Golden Rule of Empire—“Slowly, Slowly: Take Care”.....	228
	The Curse of the Motorcar.....	241
V.	Conclusion: The head boys of Empire.....	259
VI.	Bibliography.....	261

I. Introduction

Civil servants and bureaucrats are, by the very nature of their positions, an army in the shadows. They are the force behind the scenes of the great production that is statecraft, diplomacy, and policy-formation. They are the stagehands and the prop-builders; they are the caretakers and the attendants, but scarcely ever are they the stars. Their presence is constantly felt, but rarely seen or acknowledged. The echoes of their existence can be read in the thousands of pages of memoranda circulating the desks of government ministers, in the transmission of official correspondence, and in the eternal stacks of legislation drafted by their ink-stained hands. Though they are instrumental to the functionality of modern states, they are perceived as the unheard and unseen grey men—and so they have remained throughout history. As long as historians have been able to write of modern state structures, state sovereignty, and the existence of centralized government—a process that began to take shape in the early seventeenth century—these individuals have played a dynamic, yet unacknowledged role in the inner-workings of government. Who, if not the bureaucrat, oversees the collection of taxes? Who drafts legislation? What institution, but the civil service, ensures that the leaders of government do not drown in a sea of red tape? Ministers come and ministers go with the tide of public opinion, but the civil servant remains. In short, the show could not go on without them.

Despite their undeniable importance, historians tend to completely ignore the integral role played by civil servants in ensuring the efficiency and survival of governing establishments. In his seminal work on the construction of the modern British state structure, *Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783*, historian John Brewer attempted to explain this phenomenon when he wrote of bureaucratic institutions: “No group can ever have written so much and yet remained so anonymous. This is partly attributable to the difficulties of

reconstructing their lives, but also the consequence of snobbery.”¹ Brewer’s analysis provides an apt description for why bureaucracies have for so long remained ignored entities. Although deeply engrained into the state establishment, Brewer hypothesizes that little is made of the role of the civil servant because either, at first glance, too little information is known about them to gain an understanding of their influence, their ambitions, and their ideology; or, more likely, because of a snobbish tendency to dismiss them as actors without agency. Historian Michael J. Braddick represents this latter explanation well in his *State-Formation in Early Modern England, 1550-1700*, where he explained: “bureaucrats have no personal control over their actions, they are simply implementing the rules and doing their job.”² Generally, the tendency for most scholars has been to adopt a similar stance to Braddick, depicting civil servants as non-aligned, apolitical robots—they are given orders; they follow orders: nothing more, nothing less.³ The

¹ John Brewer, *Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), xvi; See also, Michael Man’s, “The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms, and results” in John A. Hall (ed.) *States in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)

² Michael J. Braddick, *State-Formation in Early Modern England, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 21

³ Max Weber, Gunther Roth, and Claus Wittich, *Economy and Society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (London: 1979); Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London’s geographics, 1680-1780* (New York: 1998); William Ashworth, *Customs and excise: Trade, Production, and consumption in England, 1640-1845* (Oxford, 2003). In each of these examples, the authors view the creation of modern bureaucracies as being integral to the formation of modern state systems, but view bureaucrats themselves as “neutral,” “impartial,” and “mathematical.” In particular Weber insinuates that bureaucrats were mere facilitators of information passing. Their function began and ended with transfer of data back and forth between the center and the periphery; See also, Gail Savage, *The Social Construction of Expertise* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 8, 183-189. Savage concludes that civil servants “did not commonly exhibit a self-conscious class identity;” instead, she argues, their identity was almost solely limited to their own professional identity. Further, she contends that civil servants in Britain used any power and influence they did have to achieve only limited ends. Other examples of bureaucratic neglect include Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961, 1980); Charles Tilly’s argument in *Coercion and Capital And European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell publishing, 1992), hinges on the thesis that ‘war made the state so the state could make war’; For an excellent overview of this trend

typical historical understanding of the machinery of government insinuates that policy is handed down to the civil servant at the whims and pleasure of the so-called ‘great men’. Then and only then, with no amount of agency or influence, the civil servant merely executes the given policy, precisely as instructed. For most, this is where their story ends.

Nowhere has this quandary remained so apparent as it has within the historiography of the British Empire. Only cursory mention is made of the colonial civil servants stationed in Britain’s imperial outposts across the globe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Mistakenly, the colonial civil services have been saddled with the very same attitudes and assumptions made of bureaucracies as a whole. As a result, very little question has been made of colonial civil servants’ contribution to imperial policy-making, or their role in the execution of that policy. Instead, their influence is drowned out by a focus on prime ministers, colonial secretaries, viceroys, governors, chief secretaries, and high commissioners. Typically, when historians write of the influence of the ‘men on the spot’ they are referring to the often flamboyant and infamous ‘rulers’ and ‘crafters’ of empire.

An excellent example of this trend is Kwasi Kwarteng’s *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s Legacies in the Modern World*. In his study, Kwarteng promises to take “an unusual approach” to empire by examining the “forgotten officials and governors, without whom [the empire] would not have survived a few weeks.”⁴ His focus: Frederick Lugard, Herbert Kitchener, Henry John Templeton, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, George Nathaniel Curzon, and the like. These figures have not been forgotten; they are the men who are most often touted as the face of the British Empire. In historical circles, they are remembered because they were often shrewd, flashy,

see, Aaron Graham, *Corruption, Party, and Government in Britain, 1702-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴ Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain’s Legacies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 1-3.

aggressive, and frequently in the public limelight. Even with Kwarteng's claims of an 'unorthodox' account of these "forgotten officials," he relegates the collective of the British colonial services to anonymity, often not even seeing them as being important enough to be called by name. Multiple times throughout the book, Kwarteng refers to the generic "beleaguered civil servant at Government House," unnamed with no reference to his title or his function in the colonial government.⁵ Further, Kwarteng makes no real attempt to discuss the role of the officials who were actually dictating and performing policy at the local level.

Unfortunately, such an approach has become the rule, rather than the exception. Sweeping studies of the formation and development of the British Empire, such as Lawrence James' *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, Dennis Judd's *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present*, Philippa Levine's *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*, Ronald Hyam's *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914* and *Understanding the British Empire*, and Jeremy Paxman's *Empire* all virtually ignore the activities of colonial civil servants.⁶ Although Paxman, for instance, felt inclined to mention the active role of the colonial civil servant in the Empire, he still all but dismisses the overall importance of these figures, especially regarding the most important colonial servants of all—the district officers. The "diaries and letters of district officers," he says, "tell a...mundane story."⁷ Paxman continued,

It [a district officer's life in the Empire] was frequently a life of stoical endurance, rudimentary comforts, terrible food, tedious bureaucracy, and numbing loneliness, in pursuit of small initiatives—a bridge here, a bit of irrigation there—which might better

⁵ Ibid, 295-96.

⁶ Lawrence James', *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Dennis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1996); Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Those who do acknowledge the bureaucracy diminish it by arguing that it was limited by an absence of a unified ethos. An excellent example of this is Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.), 211-216.

⁷ Jeremy Paxman, *Empire* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2011), 199.

the lives of the community in which the district officer found himself. And in addition to the frustrations of life in the bush, district officers had to cope with the clods in London. 'Documents no longer needed may be destroyed,' a Colonial Office directive is imagined to have ordered, 'provided copies are made in duplicate.'"⁸

Such is often the degree of interest one finds in the historical analyses of the colonial services.

Banal, 'red-tapey', routine, ordinary, these are the standard buzzwords often attributed to civil servants in the Empire. If they are mentioned at all in imperial histories it is merely to point out their existence in the bureaucratic machine. In those rare instances when the reader catches a glimpse of an imperial bureaucrat, the latter is typically left unnamed and only mentioned in passing. The same is largely true of other prominent academic works that deal with the British Empire, such as Caroline Elkins' *Imperial Reckoning*. Elkins, though predominately dealing with the decolonization of empire, wrote of British imperial administration in Kenya during the 20th century,

The governor was ultimately an agent of the British Colonial Office who had immense discretion in running Kenya. The poor communications linking London to its empire meant that the Colonial Office had little choice but to devolve significant share of decision making to the local man in charge. Even when communications improved significantly, the colonial secretary still continued to operate by proxy through his governors, rather than trying to control these faraway imperial agents' day-to-day decision making. The effectiveness of the link between Kenya and the Colonial Office depended almost entirely on the personal relationship between the colonial secretary and the governor, their shared ethos of imperial domination, and their ability to reach consensus through bargaining and negotiations.⁹

In all of these works the implication was the same: the governor was the most important man on the spot and the colonial civil servant was a figure with limited influence that lived a generally trite existence.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York; Henry Holt and Company, LLC), 9.

The historiographical disregard for the imperial civil servant, the literal man on the spot, exists to the detriment of the field of British imperial studies. By consistently ignoring the administrators and government servants on the periphery, most notably the district officers of Empire, historians have ascertained only a partial picture of British imperial administration and the ideology behind it.¹⁰ The district officer was the most important figure within Britain's overseas bureaucracies in that it was left to him to make the day-to-day, minute-to-minute decisions that pushed the Empire forward. Quite literally, he ran the imperial administration. As will be demonstrated in the following sections, political officers within the colonial districts very often generated the actual policies being enacted at the local level; or, at the very least, they chose *how* policies from above would be implemented. Taking such an approach to colonial government flips the traditional narrative of imperial administration on its head; rather than the civil servants of the empire loyally carrying out the orders of the central government without question, it becomes clear that the Empire was often run in spite of Whitehall and Government House, not because of it. Across the Dependent Empire, the district officer served as the cornerstone of imperial administration, overseeing virtually every aspect of colonial society within his district. He administered the collection of taxes; he was responsible for the police; he oversaw the production of agriculture and the construction of railway lines, schools, and hospitals. The district officer served as the judge, jury, and executioner for hundreds, or even thousands, of square miles of territory, often comprised of hundreds of thousands of colonial subjects. As one former administrator put it, "in the history of Colonial Rule the work of the

¹⁰ The terminology used to denote the titles of servants of the Colonial Office tends to vary depending upon the time and location in question. In Nigeria, for instance, officials like Grier were referred to as District Residents, as opposed to District Officer, Assistant Resident, as opposed to Assistant District Officer, and so forth. Nonetheless, despite the differences in their official titles, their duties were nearly identical. For the sake of clarity and uniformity, I have chosen to apply the title District Officer or Assistant District Officer.

district officer deserves a chapter of its own. But it is not an easy chapter to write. One cannot catalogue his multiplex activities; whatever his hand finds to do he does.”¹¹

Yet, with regard to the historical record, the “chapter” allotted to the men on whom the reputation of the government rested and who, quite literally, ran the empire has been quite short and often distorted. The very same criticisms levied against their domestic counterparts have been exacted upon members of the colonial civil services during the height of the British Empire. In contrast to this tendency, a careful review of the historical record makes clear that much can be learned about the nature of British imperialism in the latter half of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century through an exposition of the lives of the officers who made up the imperial civil services. Close analysis of the writings of former district officers and their assistants demonstrates that these men were anything but passive onlookers. Rather than proving representative of their reputation as ‘grey men’, colonial bureaucrats were colorful, opinionated, independent, influential and, very often, defiant.

Take, for instance, the example of Selwyn Macgregor Grier, Assistant Resident to Zaria Province in the British colony of Northern Nigeria, from February 1907 to December 1910. In December 1910, Grier wrote to his sister, Dorothy,

As far as I can judge...the result of the [general] election [of 1910] is to leave things practically where they were before the election, which is exactly what I expected. I suppose that the next thing will be to cripple the House of Lords, give home rule to Ireland, reduce the army and navy and generally play the _____ [Grier’s omission]. I only hope some of your suffragette friends will completely lay out Birrell next time, for I must confess he is the one man in the present government whom I think more noxious and more untrustworthy than any other. I always picture him as a...dissenter with a

¹¹ From the Foreword by Lord William Malcolm Hailey in Kenneth Bradley, *The Diary of A District Officer* (London: Gorge G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1943), 5.

prayer on his lips and a lie in his heart. If only your friends would permanently lay him out and one or two others who I could mention.¹²

In an earlier letter, penned in 1907, Grier wrote, “my own opinion of the present government is a set of incompetent fools led by a feeble invertebrate.”¹³ Describing British efforts in India, he complained in the same year, “I see that in India the results of Curzonism are already showing themselves—people like Curzon should be shot!”¹⁴ A few years later in January of 1911, Grier wrote:

I see in my last papers that Balfour dropped Tariff reform for the time being so as to ‘concentrate’. Why don’t the free traders vote conservative? Surely they ought to have done so, for few of them can approve of the tactics of Lloyd George and co. who have degraded or are trying to degrade English politics to the same level as in France where a French deputy is looked upon with contempt by all decent people. When I come home to England I shall introduce a new Guy Fawkes conspiracy and blow the whole caboodle sky high.¹⁵

Exceedingly political, brashly confident, and unafraid to voice his opinions, Grier’s musings to his family sound nothing like what one would perhaps expect to hear from a ‘lowly bureaucrat’.

Beyond just these demonstrative examples, Grier was an ardent opponent of free trade. He characterized tariff reform, which many Liberals of his heyday extolled as “new” and “glorious,” as a primitive policy of “grab” that would effectually decimate the Empire’s poor and heighten “the distinction between classes and masses.”¹⁶ He entered fierce debates with his sister, Dorothy Grier, who happened to be a prominent supporter of Britain’s suffragette

¹² United Kingdom. Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford [RHO]. Sir Selwyn Macgregor Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, December 1910.

¹³ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379, Letter to Dorothy Grier, June 18, 1907.

¹⁴ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379, Letter to Dorothy Grier, December 1910.

¹⁵ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379, Letter to his sister, January 11, 1911.

¹⁶ Lord Walter Frewen, “The Creed of Imperialism” *Nineteenth-Century and After* Vol. LXVI (July-December, 1909); Although published in a separate source, Grier specifically references this article and explained to his sister that it was the first time he “came across a publication in which I was in complete agreement with practically every word.” (RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, September 21, 1909.)

movement, attempting to discredit the validity of her claims that females should have the right to vote. He also often complained to his mother and sister that the character of Englishmen was being tarnished by decadence and a loss of backbone and courage—the very characteristics that he believed had made Britain great in the first place.¹⁷ Such sentiments, and the many more that Grier penned like them, hardly sound like the apolitical robots so often depicted in imperial historiography. Grier, like most of his fellow district officers, did not view themselves as non-committal bystanders, nor did they act in such a manner.

Moreover, the argument regarding the importance of the district officer is not relegated only to the fact that these men had opinions; rather, it is also true that they exhibited a great deal of actual influence on the formulation and execution of imperial policy. By the turn of the twentieth-century, district officers viewed themselves as being naturally disposed to positions of leadership. Most district officers were the products of Britain's elitist public schools—such as Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Marlborough, and the other so-called 'great schools—and universities, particularly Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁸ These Victorian educational institutions served as the pool from which the vast majority of civil servants were selected, and it was here that men learned

¹⁷ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379, Letter to Dorothy Grier, September 21, 1909.

¹⁸ In particular, see Edward Allen, "Public School Elites in Early Victorian England: the boys at Harrow and at Merchant Taylors' Schools from 1825 to 1850." *Journal of British Studies* 21 (1982); Also, J.A. Mangan, "The Education of an Elite Imperial Administration: The Sudan Political Service and the British and the British Public School System," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (4) (1982), 671-99; Norman Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit: The ideal of Christian manliness in Victorian literature and religious thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic of Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1986); See, for example, Brian Simon and Ian Bradley, eds. *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of and Educational Institution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975); Gary McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings: Education for leadership in Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Robert Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers: The Making of the British Colonial Service* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

how to be men.¹⁹ From their eighth birthday right through to their eighteenth, boys from the upper and middle classes were isolated from the outside world and imbued with the importance of athleticism, adventure, the habit of leadership, compassion, pragmatism, patriotism, and paternalism.²⁰

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this type of education was the fact that students were generally aware of the direction and purpose of their training. The very specific aim of these institutions was to produce ‘natural leaders’, men who were to be the next prime ministers, captains of industry, and rulers of empire.²¹ The strict hierarchy of the school system taught boys how to exercise responsibility and authority, to embrace it, and to accept it as their lot in life. These were not the kind of individuals who sat quietly, pen in hand, waiting for orders. They were movers and doers; what their hands found to do, they did with all the confidence of someone who had been told from adolescence that it was their job to make decisions. Neutrality and impartiality were simply not in their nature, and such vibrancy translated to the Empire with profound results.

A final question for consideration is, as one historian has recently asked, how can another study of the administrators of empire do anything but glorify the colonial past?²² Stated more simply, how is another study of the colonizer beneficial? The answer is, at once, simple and monumentally important: the District Officer was the face of British Imperialism and served at the point of contact between colonized and colonizer. What better way to analyze the true nature

¹⁹ Rober Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*; Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service*.

²⁰ J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic of Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1986).

²¹ See, for example, Brian Simon and Ian Bradley, eds. *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of an Educational Institution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975); McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings*; Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*.

²² Barney Sebe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 3.

of imperialism than to observe this relationship? Lugard's *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, for instance, gives us all the policy without any of the humanity. It is but one side of the imperial coin. The actions, identity, motives, and values of the literal 'man on the spot' provide historians with a much more accurate picture of British imperialism as it was conceived by the colonizer, and experienced and resisted by the colonized. Thus, gauging how these administrators saw themselves, their duties, and those they ruled provides greater insight into the nature of British imperialism than any study of colonial policy from above could ever hope to accomplish, and opens up new areas of future research.

The few studies that have explored the inner-workings of the Colonial Service have failed to adequately reflect this mindset; neither have they been able to place this body in the larger framework of British imperial historiography. Principally, studies of the Colonial Civil Service have fallen into one of two major categories. First, there are the immensely informative, yet often contextually limited administrative histories. The best examples of this kind of scholarship include A.H.M. Kirk-Greene's *On Crown Service: A History of HM Colonial and Overseas Civil Services, 1837-1997*, D.C.M. Platt's *The Cinderella Service since 1825*, and Robert Heussler's *Yesterday's Rulers: The Making of the British Colonial Service*.²³ Such scholarly inquiries have contributed invaluable information about who these servicemen were, where they came from, and how they were educated and trained, but present little insight into their lasting impact. What footprint did they leave behind? How much autonomy did these figures have in their various colonial outposts? Were they able to shape, guide, or alter imperial policy-making to any lasting

²³ Also see, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Kirk-Greene, "The Sudan Political Service: A Profile in the Sociology of Imperialism." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15 (1982), 21-48.

degree? Or had they truly no control over their actions? Such questions remain largely unanswered in these kinds of studies.

The second existing source for Colonial Service histories can be found in the recollections of former servicemen, themselves. There is no shortage of published memoirs and autobiographies written by retired district officers and other colonial officials in the waning years of empire. In their own unique way, these sources are indispensable to historians as they provide a glimpse into the mind's eye of those who were charged with overseeing extraordinarily vast territories and diverse groups of people.²⁴ As with any first-hand account, though, these sources too are not without their limitations. The hesitation of relying solely on the reminiscences of former servicemen is largely two-fold. First, although such works represent carefully reconstructed accounts of the life and times of Colonial Office civil servants, their authors are often years—and more often decades—removed from the events in question. Thus, these memoirs rely heavily on the author's memory of details, and an *interpretation* of diaries, journals, correspondence, official papers, and so forth. The fear, of course, is in relying solely on an individual's power of retention of a multitude of far-gone dates, events, facts, and feelings from which we can draw historical conclusions.

Furthermore, there is always the regretful possibility that the author may, with or without malice, take into consideration his own legacy or the legacies of those with whom he served when recording his experiences. Whether through addition or omission, however rare of an occurrence as this may be, such considerations could result in a skewed depiction of events in

²⁴ For example, see E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate: A British District Officer in Tanganyika* (London: Archon Books, 1976); Kenneth Bradley, *The Diary of a District Officer* (London: Macmillan, 1966); Frank Hives, *Juju and Justice in Nigeria* (New York: Ballantine Books); L. Barnes, *The Duty of Empire* (Victor Gollancz, 1935); Kenneth Bradley, *Once a District Officer* (London: St. Martin's, 1965); John Roscoe, *Twenty-Five Years in East Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921). See bibliography for a complete list.

question, or could even provoke a general misunderstanding of the larger historical context. One of the pre-eminent scholars of Britain's Colonial Civil Service, Anthony Kirk-Greene, suggested that memoirs provide a more accurate representation of the district officer than any other type of source. His argument is based on the conviction that letters home to parents, spouses, or children, for instance, "tend to omit things that 'Mum would rather not read about' or 'Dad would not be interested in.'"²⁵ However, while it is possible that in some cases this may have been true, the converse is probably much more likely. It would be quite natural for a son or brother or cousin, serving in an isolated territory far from home, to provide much more honest and candid expressions to family members than they ever would be able to in official memoranda or published recollection. Likewise, it is probable that many of the most telling experiences or sentiments might be disregarded in the writing of a memoir as being too sentimental or personal when, in fact, those details tend to be some of the most revealing. District officers spent a considerable amount of time alone, isolated from their friends, families, and countrymen. They served in a far off land that would have been quite alien to their relatives and companions back in Britain. To the district officer this was their job, but both they and their families were quite aware that it was a job unlike any other. Like lots of parents, they asked many questions. And like any faithful son, they tried their best to supply adequate answers.

There are, then, troves of family letters, diaries, and journals, which have not been given sufficient examination. These, along with memoirs and official government documentation, beg to be investigated in search of a thorough representation of the men who ruled an empire from the ground. As will be seen, this inquiry into the colonial services is just as much about culture as it is about politics and administration. The official mind of British imperialism, orchestrated

²⁵ The argument referred to here is made most strongly in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) xix-xx.

and implemented at the ground level by imperial civil servants, originated according to a very particular worldview adopted by an entire generation of administrators. Methodologically, this dissertation seeks to re-construct that worldview and its ideological foundations. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to analyze the private reflections and recollections of the district officer. What was he writing back home to his family in his quiet, private moments? What did he consider important enough to include in his memoirs, and why? What did district officers want historians and future generations know about their contribution to the British Empire? It is with these intimate reflections, rather than official memoranda and policy, that this dissertation is most concerned. A careful analysis of these documents demonstrate that there is still much to be learned about the formation and execution of imperial policy *and* the nature of British imperialism from the latter half of the nineteenth-century into the early twentieth.

Setting the Scene:

During the twilight years of his life the Duke of Wellington allegedly made his now famous remark that the Battle of Waterloo had been won on the playing fields of Eton College. As legend has it, the Duke, by then old with age and the burdens of a long career in public service, returned to his alma mater where he encountered a group of young pupils heatedly engaged in a game of cricket. Gesturing in the direction of the students busying themselves on the school grounds he uttered stoically to his companions, “there grows the stuff that won Waterloo.”²⁶ In many ways, the Great Britain of Wellington’s later years was much different than the country he had defended from the tyranny of the Bonapartist regime. The Duke survived Britain’s first ‘Great War’ only to become a leading figure in Parliament and a witness to the heart of Queen Victoria’s reign. During this latter part of his life, though—a period that stretched from the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 to Wellington’s own death in 1852—Britain found itself in the throes of its own unique and multi-faceted revolution. This revolution was not entirely political in nature. It did not stem from a desire to throw off the yoke of an absolutist king, nor did it emanate from any one set of enlightened principles; rather the revolution facing Great Britain in first half of the 19th century was one rooted in a patently British vision of morality.²⁷ More specifically, the post-Waterloo environment established that political leadership could no longer be separated from moral leadership.²⁸ In response, after 1815 Britain’s own national consciousness became obsessed with the notion of power. Far more than power for power’s sake, though, Britain’s intellectual elite became infatuated with what they saw as the

²⁶ Sir Edward Creasy, *Memoirs of Eminent Etonians* (London: Savill, Edwards, and Co., 1876), 521.

²⁷ Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1972), 19-23.

²⁸ Rupert Wilkinson, *The Prefects: British Leadership and the Public School Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 16.

proper execution of their country's newfound predominance. Although the Duke could not have known just how prophetic his words actually were at the time, whole generations of Etonians (as well as other young men who attended Britain's so-called 'great schools') were about to embark on an entirely new battle, one aimed at carrying the ideals of British civilization across the globe.

Following a bitter struggle of near on two decades, the French dictator whom the British people had so belittlingly ridiculed as 'Little Boney' was gone, sent off to live the rest of his days in exile on the isolated hell that was the island of St. Helena. At long last Britain emerged unchallenged as the preeminent power of Europe, secure from the danger of invasion and defeat, master of the seas, and holder of the largest empire in the world. In the midst of this euphoria, Britain entered into a period of change more pronounced than perhaps any other in its history. Waterloo proved more than just a great victory on the battlefield; it vindicated the British way of life, and some interpreted it as proof of Britain's divinely appointed destiny.²⁹ The entire nation celebrated the outcome of this event. Just days after the battle the *London Times* reported, "Nothing in ancient or in modern history equals the effect of the victory of Waterloo."³⁰ Lord Robert Castlereagh, appointed Britain's Foreign Secretary in 1812, struggled to find the right words to do justice to the momentousness of the occasion when he addressed Parliament on the 23rd of June 1815. Castlereagh suggested that Britain's success at Waterloo represented "an achievement of such high merit, of such pre-eminent importance, as had never graced the annals of this country or any other country till now..."³¹ At long last, many felt Britain might finally be free to establish on its "green and pleasant land" the "New Jerusalem" envisioned by William

²⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 368-9.

³⁰ "London, Wednesday, June 28, 1815." *Times* [London, England] 28 June 1815: 3. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 4 Oct. 2014.

³¹ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 31 (1815), cols. 980-989.

Blake in his widely read poem of 1808.³² This manner of thinking only crystalized as Britain embarked upon an unprecedented era of industrial, economic, and imperial predominance after 1815.³³ Once and for all, it seemed, the tyrannical, Catholic, French ‘Other’ had perished at the hand of British liberty and Protestantism.³⁴

If Waterloo had shown Britons anything, it proved to them the infallibility of their constitutional system. It cemented in their minds what many already believed about their country’s history: namely, that the British Isles were the freest place on Earth.³⁵ At last, the fall of France appeared to have given them proof. As historian Linda Colley demonstrates, Britons were taught from an early age that they had been born into an elect nation, “marked out by God with the possession of a peculiar degree of freedom...”³⁶ Wilfrid Prest echoed these sentiments in his work, *Albion Ascendant*. Prest argues that, despite all of the vast changes that took place in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, the one constant was an inherent belief in the innate and distinctive superiority of the English system.³⁷ One commentator cited by Prest stated matter-of-factly, “I do not think there is a people more prejudiced in their own favour [*sic*]...”³⁸

³² William Blake, “And Did those feet in Ancient time” in *Preface to Milton, a poem* (1810)

³³ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 151-158.

³⁴ For an explanation on the ways French difference contributed to the development of a British identity in the 18th and 19th century, see Colley, *Britons*, especially 321-369.

³⁵ G.M. Trevelyan, *The English Revolution, 1688-1689* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 129. The apparent efforts of the Stuarts to destroy Parliament was viewed as a direct attack on the natural rights of Englishmen and a direct violation of Magna Carta and its establishment of Common Law. For Trevelyan, the Glorious Revolution marked the triumph of liberty in England, and prepared its people for the national power and prominence to come; See also, Brian Levack *The Formation of the British State: England, Scotland, and the Union, 1603-1707* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

³⁶ Colley, *Britons*, 111.

³⁷ Wilfrid Prest, *Albion Ascendant: English History, 1660-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109. Levack, *The Formation of the British State: England, Scotland, and the Union, 1603-1707* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

In the minds of many, Waterloo only substantiated the Glorious Revolution as the very symbol of Britishness, and a clear sign of the superiority of the English model of government over their French counterparts. With this realization—and with the downfall of their mortal enemy—came a great deal of pressure, the pressure to validate their victory. As a result, throughout the last three-quarters of the nineteenth-century, Victorians romanticized the very concept of governance and painstakingly sought to perfect their own fanciful interpretations of Britain’s governing traditions *and* export their values abroad.

This attitude is well represented in the writings of some of the most prominent British intellectuals of the Victorian Era. The ascendancy of utilitarianism prompted by Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and numerous others, engineered a dogma that held the British nation and the state were inherently linked through the very concept of liberty. J.S. Mill, for instance, saw “the principle of nationalism as a clause of liberalism itself.”³⁹ The state, and its institutions, became imbued with the ethos that Britons had the responsibility of upholding its citizen’s natural rights to life, liberty, and the protection of property while, at the same time, promoting those same values elsewhere. As a result, through much of the nineteenth-century, Britons developed a tendency to think of their nation less in cultural terms, and more in political terms.⁴⁰ While European nationalism, for instance, tended to emanate from cultural or historical romanticism, British nationalism originated from a kind of political mythology, stretching back to the Glorious Revolution and even to Magna Carta. Thus, liberalism and representative government as a guiding spirit had, by 1815, been cemented as the chief element of British nationhood.⁴¹

³⁹ Kenneth Minogue, *Nationalism* (New York: Penguin Publishers, 1967), 134

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Levack, *The Formation of the British State*; Trevelyan, *The English Revolution*, 129.

What most Britons did not expect at the time, though, was the inevitable overhaul of their country's national character that would follow Napoleon's demise. With the French threat eliminated the British people lost their counterpart. As Colley has so accurately concluded, for all the mutual hatred that defined Anglo-French relations after 1688, war with France bound English men and women together with their Welsh and Scottish neighbors, helping them to look past their differences; war muted tensions that otherwise might have proven insurmountable; and war preserved the fragile Union forged between England, Wales, and Scotland in 1707.⁴² Oddly enough, this near constant state of conflict and struggle that has sometimes been dubbed, 'the Second One Hundred Years War,' brought with it a semblance of order and harmony within the British Isles. Against Napoleon, all of Britain had fought for their country's freedom from France and they had *won*. After 1815 though, just as the dust began to settle over the fields of Waterloo, Britons slowly came to terms with the reality that the French element no longer existed as it once had.⁴³ Generations of men and women, who once defined themselves through a deep-seated Francophobia, found this attitude no longer warranted, and euphoria quickly gave way to disorientation.⁴⁴

In response to this new environment, romantic idealism replaced the strict pragmatism and emphasis on power politics that had defined the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ Historian Niall Ferguson aptly captured the essence of this transformation when he wrote: "the British Empire of the 18th century had been, at best, amoral." Yet, the Victorians "had more elevated aspirations.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ N. Gash, "After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (1978), 146.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Also see Colley, 321-22.

⁴⁵ Barnett, *Collapse of British Power*, 21-24.

They dreamt not just of ruling the world, but of redeeming it.”⁴⁶ As Ferguson implies, an undeniable missionary element developed as a part this new identity. If, as many contemporaries believed, Britain had at long last reached the pinnacle of the civilizational hierarchy, such a gift could not be kept selfishly to oneself; rather, British values needed to be exported to the ‘less fortunate’ and ‘backward’ peoples they perceived in their own backyards and across the Empire.⁴⁷ This profound alteration of outlook infiltrated virtually every aspect of politics and society in the last three quarters of the nineteenth-century, and virtually no institution was left untouched.

Moreover, as a part of this phenomenon the new aim of the British nation was to produce individuals who possessed the innate ability to nurture, protect, and propagate what many British intellectuals deemed to be uniquely British values of liberty, morality, and service. In the midst of this metamorphosis, several major national institutions evolved to corroborate this new sense of purpose. This period of reform had profound effects on both domestic and imperial administration. The Britain of the last quarter of the 19th century would have scarcely been recognizable to those living on the Isles in 1815. Vast extensions of the franchise, a myriad of new laws to protect the poor, the creation of a meritocratic civil service, and an emphasis on ‘moral education’ were just some of the new developments that came to be identified with Victorian Britain. Working together, these remarkable developments fundamentally altered

⁴⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 93.

⁴⁷ Peter Mandler, “ ‘Race and ‘Nation’ in mid-Victorian Thought”” in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, ed., *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History, 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 226. Mandler argues that British intellectuals increasingly presumed that states naturally progressed from “primitive” to “advanced” over the course of time. He makes a convincing case for a “civilizational” perspective when examining motivations of the British State during the mid-Victorian Era.

British notions of leadership and ‘good governance’ at the exact moment British imperialists actively painted the map red.

As Britons pondered these vast and sweeping developments, they found their country embroiled in three very distinct, yet intertwined, revolutions—social, educational, and administrative—that combined to establish the basis for a British official mind. The first of these revolutions—the social revolution—emanated from the changes triggered by rapid industrialization and its societal consequences. The rise to power of the middle classes during the height of the Victorian Era re-constituted the meanings of British leadership by altering notions of the gentlemanly ideal. Whereas, prior to the so-called ‘Age of Reform’, governing power lay in the hands of Britain’s landed aristocracy, by 1884 a new class of leader rose to the fore.⁴⁸ Rather than land serving as the sole source of power within the British State, education came to act as the new prerequisite for government administration and leadership. This new paradigm allowed second and third generation industrialists’ sons to take their place as the country’s new gentlemanly governors. No longer were values of leadership something seen as being bred into a man; instead, leadership and the capacity for ‘good governance’—core tenants of the traditional British gentleman—were to be instilled through focused and mindful indoctrination in the country’s finest public schools and universities. Thus comes the second, simultaneous revolutionary category of Victorian Britain—the educational revolution.

For, at precisely the same time that education emerged as the basis for leadership among Britain’s middle classes, the country’s prominent educational establishments—the so-called ‘great schools’—underwent their own remarkable transformation. Prompted by the efforts of Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby school from 1828 to 1842, new ideals of ‘education for

⁴⁸ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

leadership' infiltrated every aspect of Victorian pedagogy. Whereas the social revolution reconstituted the gentlemanly ideal as being something that could be instilled into the sons of the middle classes, Arnold and his successors created a blueprint for carrying out this gentlemanly indoctrination. Based on Arnoldian principles, both British public schools and, in their own way, the prominent universities defined new notions of character, leadership, manliness, and 'good governance' for whole generations of future administrators.

Finally, the third and equally important of these revolutions—the administrative—streamlined the process by which this new educated elite could gain access to the government machinery. Most notably, this administrative revolution altered admittance into civil services by slowly ridding the governing establishment of its traditional vestiges of corruption and patronage in exchange for an emphasis on merit and open competition. As blood, title, and heredity slowly lost their historical associations with government, British administrators constructed an entirely new framework for selecting its leaders and public servants. Freed to become gentleman by the social revolution and indoctrinated with gentlemanly ideals of character and 'good governance' in the reformed public schools, the new, more meritocratic, environment allowed an elite cadre of men direct access, for the first time, into the administrative ranks.

Patched together in this way, a clearer picture of the official mind comes into focus. Yet, thus far, an incomplete understanding of this metamorphosis exists in British historiography, as most scholars have portrayed this period in a fragmented, piecemeal fashion. Rather than being taken together, these three revolutions have been treated as separate, even distinct, events with little to no interaction with one another. There are no shortage of studies, for instance, detailing the years of 1815 to 1867 as an 'Age of Progress' or, perhaps more appropriately, as an 'Age of Reform.' Examples of this kind of scholarship include Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and

Jane Rendall's, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender, and the Reform Act of 1867*, Jose Harris', *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870-1914*, David Cannadine's, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, and Derek Fraser's, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution*, all of which, in their own way, chronicle the vast and sweeping social changes that overtook Great Britain during the course of the 19th century by highlighting such issues as the principle effects of the two Great Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, the rise of the British Middle Class, and the downfall of the British Oligarchy.

Moreover, a completely different set of informative, though highly specialized, studies have chronicled the immensely important educational reforms that took British public school education by storm, beginning in the early 1830s when Thomas Arnold brought to the fore a wholly new methodology for instructing young Britons. This process has best been described in such works as Brian Simon and Ian Bradley's, *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of an Educational Institution*, J.R. de S. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the English Public School in the Nineteenth-century*, J.A. Mangan's, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, and Gary McCulloch's, *Philosophers and Kings: Education for Leadership in Modern England*. Each of these studies emphasize the growing importance of the so-called 'great schools' as a training ground for the nation's future leaders. Between 1850 and 1914 individual public schools came to form a homogenous system, which shared remarkably similar values and educational goals.⁴⁹ While individual institutions often approached the tutelage of pupils in different ways, the above authors are generally in agreement that the core values of each academy revolved around a nearly identical set of basic principles. These well-

⁴⁹ Brian Simon and Ian Bradley, eds. *The Victorian Public School: Studies in the Development of and Educational Institution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), 4.

respected institutions were to be much more than a place where students learned the elementary skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic; rather, they assumed responsibility for training and developing the next generation of statesmen, clergy, community leaders, and rulers of empire.

That this educational revolution spilled over into the university ranks is equally important to the development of this new British identity. In particular, Reba Soffer's *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* makes clear that the stated goal of elite universities such as Oxford and Cambridge was to "make not books, but men."⁵⁰ Through an exploration of university education at these universities, namely within the discipline of history, Soffer argues that one can better grasp the moralistic and service-driven nature of British administrators between 1870 and 1930. Higher education in England provided an overarching educational environment that created "durable patterns of behavior and permanent habits of thought."⁵¹ Within these prominent universities, curriculum was rooted in the idea of an evolving nation, which used its power to create a greater moral good.⁵² For Soffer, "English education at Oxford and Cambridge mirrored a broader national confidence in coherent intellectual and moral values in their patriotic senses."⁵³

Finally, the less discussed, but equally important of the three revolutions was strictly administrative in nature. With the publication of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report in February of 1854, the nature of the British political establishment changed forever. The corruption, inefficiency, and patronage that had marred Britain's bureaucratic institutions for the better part of two centuries was slowly remedied, and the Civil Services, at home and abroad, emerged for

⁵⁰ Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

the first time as modern, professionalized institutions. Richard Chapman's, *The Civil Service Commission, 1855-1991: A Bureau Biography*, Emmeline Cohen's, *The Growth of the British Civil Service, 1780-1939*, J. Donald Kingsley's, *Representative Bureaucracy: An Interpretation of the British Civil Service*, and A.J.M Kirk-Greene's, *On Crown Service: A History of HM Colonial and Overseas Civil Services, 1837-1997* are representative of this historical genre.

Despite the plethora of scholarship on these subjects, though, there has been no one historical inquiry, which has attempted to examine these three revolutions in unison. More importantly for this study, neither has there been a systematic effort to study the consequences of these domestic transformations on the development of an imperial ideology or, more specifically, on the existence of an official mind of Empire. Instead, as David Cannadine asserted, one of the most glaring and prevalent problems in the historiography of the British Empire is that it is written, "as if it were completely separate and distinct from the history of the British nation."⁵⁴ There could be no greater folly than to fail to take these words to heart when engaging in a study of the individuals who made up Britain's Colonial Civil Service. The British district officer was the purest example of this new environment; in many ways he was its original product. The maturation of colonial officials at the turn of the twentieth-century through to the early 1930s corresponded directly with this era of reform *and* the height of Britain's imperial experiment. Practically without exception, candidates selected for the services were appointed to positions across the Empire based almost solely on their conformity to these newly established ideals. No study of the district officer, therefore, could be complete without a thorough re-investigation of this radical era of change.

⁵⁴ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xvii.

Structure:

In accordance with these aims, this dissertation is structured in three parts. Part I examines the consequences of three particular evolutionary phases of revolutionary reform—social, educational, and administrative—which occurred from 1828 to 1909, and combined to establish new norms in the conceptualization of colonial governance by re-defining—or in some cases re-emphasizing—uniquely British definitions of such notions as leadership, manliness, public service, duty, and what would have been termed by colonial officials as ‘sound administration’. New applications of these terms fundamentally altered the recruitment of men into the British Civil Services, and selected candidates were appointed to positions in the Empire based almost solely on their conformity to these newly established ideals. No study of the District Officer, therefore, could be complete without a thorough investigation of this radical era of change. This is due in no small part to the fact that the men under consideration in this study were the outgrowth of this new environment. Indeed, in many ways they were its original products; their maturation at the turn of the twentieth-century through to the early 1930s corresponded directly with this era of reform *and* the height of Britain’s imperial experiment.

Part II takes a fresh approach to the role of the administrative officer as he served abroad in the Empire. Though he was not the glamorous face of British imperialism written about in the journals and newspapers back at home, he was, more than any other in the colonial setting, seen as the individual who could get things done; he was the one person in the colonial government who was expected to truly understand what was happening in a particular district on a day-to-day basis; and he was immensely important to the entire imperial system. Ask an average subject of British colonial rule in Africa who Lord Lugard was and, maybe they could tell you, maybe they couldn’t; but with few exceptions local communities knew or had at least felt the presence of

their district officer. He was the man who took all the blame when things went wrong, but received little to no praise when small successes were gained.

The purpose of this section is to establish, for the first time in this context, the immense importance of British administrative officers to the functionality of the colonial government, across the Empire. It aims to outline his daily responsibilities, which were endless; the conditions of service that he endured; the independence he exhibited from his superiors; and, equally as important, it explores the ways in which the ‘revolutions’ described in Part I framed the district officer’s goals, identity, ideology and his responses to his environment. In taking such an approach, a clearer picture of British imperialism is brought into focus through a look at the men who were its flag bearers.

Part III will place the over-arching contentions put forth in this dissertation in the larger context of British imperial historiography. It addresses the ways in which administrative officers approached concepts such race and difference; how they defined the Empire and their role in it; and, finally, some commonly held sentiments regarding their own perceived failings and regrets.

II. Part I: Enslaving the Intellectual

*Self reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
Yet not for power, (power of herself
Would come uncalled for), but to live by law,
Acting the law we live by without fear;
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.*

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Oenone* (1829)

For the better part of three decades, the fate of the British Empire hinged largely on the decisions of a single man working out of a cramped and dreary office on Whitehall Street. Sir Ralph Dolignon Furse, a sandy-haired, Oxford product, with hawkish features began his career as an assistant recruiter in the Colonial Office in 1910 at the age of twenty-three. Later, after a distinguished career in the military during the First World War, Furse served as the chief recruiter for Britain's Colonial Civil Services [C.S.], a position he held from 1919 to 1948.⁵⁵ Furse's contribution to the survival and expansion of the Empire rests on the fact that he personally filled the ranks of Britain's imperial administration across much of the Dependent Empire. Throughout his career, Furse conducted thousands of interviews of prospective applicants, and chose hundreds of future district officers and innumerable other colonial administrators.⁵⁶ Even more importantly, it was Furse who constructed the blueprint for the selection of colonial civil servants, which endured for more than a quarter of a century. Furse, more than any other, defined the parameters for the selection of candidates for service in the Empire. Retrospectively, in his memoirs, he summarized the basis of his approach as such:

We felt strongly that in the wider and more varied field of colonial administration—with its direct human contacts and constant call for patience and good manners, for courage

⁵⁵ Robert Huessler, *Yesterday's Rulers*; Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 27; Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa*, 6.

⁵⁶ Huessler, *Yesterday's Rulers*.

and decision, foresight, a sense of humour [*sic*] and imaginative sympathy—character and personality were more important still, and could not be assessed by any examination yet devised.⁵⁷

These words encapsulate the very essence of Furse’s ideology and express very simply the fundamental approach, which defined Britain’s imperial recruitment at the height of its Empire. Namely, Furse and his supporting cast determined *character*, more than any other factor, to be the most essential consideration when distinguishing a successful candidate from his competitors. As Furse, himself, once concretely affirmed, “Men of brains should be slaves, slaves of the men of character.”⁵⁸

In his pursuit of such men, Furse likened his duties as a recruiter to those of an animal tracker: no clue could be neglected and no detail was too small to be considered.⁵⁹ According to Furse, the selection system was like judging horses or picking a cricket side: “if you are going to do some cross country jumping,” he reasoned, “you need a big, strong horse with power and strength in his legs so that he can take hard jolts without breaking bones.”⁶⁰ Each man selected for the team “could have his special talents and his particular contribution to make, but if they did not operate as a team it was no use.”⁶¹ So too, he reasoned, would it work in the colonial services. The question for Furse and his colleagues became merely how to judge a man’s aptitude for empire work. At the end of his career, Furse recalled that “material considerations were very far from being all that counted” when in the midst of a search for future Colonial Office civil servants.⁶² In other words, a man and his readiness to assume responsibilities in the

⁵⁷ Sir Ralph Dolignon Furse, *Aucuparius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 69.

⁵⁸ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 29.

⁵⁹ Furse, 230.

⁶⁰ RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss.Brit.Emp.s.480, Notes from a meeting with Furse in London, October 13, 1960.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

Empire rested on more than just a diploma or an impressive résumé. Furse wholeheartedly believed that only a very special type of person could thrive in the rigors of Colonial Service life and, principally because of this conviction, he spent the better part of his career attempting to perfect a system for identifying those best suited for the job. As Furse perceived it, loneliness, hardship, countless risks to one's health, and unimagined personal responsibility all exemplified attributes of a civil servant's existence in the Empire and distinguished C.S. men from those he deemed more appropriately suited for the Home Civil Services.⁶³ When asked to differentiate between the selection process of men destined for the C.S. and those more suited for domestic service, Furse asserted that an excellent administrator in London could, in all likelihood, represent a "public danger in the Empire."⁶⁴ In his judgment, the duties and challenges of colonial civil servants were unparalleled.

As historian Robert Heussler recounted from their private conversations, Furse saw colonial administrators as "bearers of civilization" sent to protect "primitive peoples" and guide them through the rigorous challenges of modernity.⁶⁵ To be successful in its aims, Furse believed the C.S. needed a consistent supply of individuals who embodied a very specific set of character traits. In particular, in the words of Heussler, "Furse had to be sure that each applicant had demonstrated conclusively in adolescence and early manhood a genuine concern for the less fortunate."⁶⁶ Or, as someone intimately familiar with Furse's methods put it:

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ RHO. Papers of Sir Ralph Furse: MSS.Brit.Emp.s.415. Box 1, "Minute on the quality of the CS," 1921.

⁶⁵ Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*, 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid; When looking at closely at Furse's career there is perhaps no better source than the works and writings of Robert Heussler. Heussler, one of the first professional historians to document the making of the Colonial Civil Service, conducted countless interviews and innumerable correspondence with Furse. As such, his writings provide an otherwise unobtainable glimpse into the mind's eye of the CS' chief recruiter.

Furse worked by intuition, drawing upon facts. His aim was to get men fit in physique, reasonably harmonious in temperament, and with enough "character" to be the fathers of their Districts.⁶⁷

With this object in mind, Furse's assessment of candidates was rigorous; any perceived sign of weakness, no matter how small, threatened to end a young man's dream of serving abroad before it began.⁶⁸ Prior to granting an interview, Furse took into consideration the details of an applicant's entire life from birth, including every stage of his family background and his educational career.⁶⁹ Many of the personnel files in Furse's office, for instance, were marked with the designation "S of F," which meant "son of father." Men descending from families with a history of service were primary targets for Furse because he believed, in all likelihood, that these men knew first-hand the nature and seriousness of imperial service. According to Charles Jeffries, who worked closely with Furse in the Colonial Office, "boys who came from such families were trustworthy; they knew what the service was like, they could be counted on not to have narrow financial motives for joining, [and] not to think of the service as merely a job."⁷⁰ Jeffries stated plainly that if Furse or his staff interviewed an applicant who was able to say that his "Uncle Fred" inspired him with his stories of "serving in Uganda," he was virtually guaranteed a position.⁷¹

During the actual interviews, Furse's approach was intensely thorough, almost obsessively so, and he based his conclusions on much more than just biographical data and family histories. He aimed to size up the whole man and there were many other factors besides

⁶⁷ RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480, Box 2, file 6, folio 16, "Letter from W.R. Crocker," August 16, 1960.

⁶⁸ Furse, *Aucuparius*, 230-31; RHO. Papers of Robert Heussler. Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480

⁶⁹ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 27.

⁷⁰ RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480, Box 1, file 3, folio 48, "Notes from Sir Charles Jeffries," June 22, 1960.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

applications and test scores that resonated with Furse. On one particular occasion, Furse conducted an interview with a man of about twenty who was fresh out of Oxford, and whom Furse described as a very intelligent and promising candidate. Yet, upon meeting for the interview, the young applicant approached Furse and greeted him with a “weak and languid handshake.” Later, Furse remembered

“the interview revealed nothing against him, but those limp fingers worried me...when he hung out his fingers to say good-bye I slipped my hand forward and gripped his whole hand. His palm was hard as nails. I put him in and he proved a success.”⁷²

In a similar episode, Furse interviewed another young man to whom he had nearly decided to offer a position when, unexpectedly, Furse’s telephone rang out from his desk. The abrupt noise startled the candidate to such a degree that Furse refused to accept him.⁷³ Someone with such an unsteady disposition, Furse reasoned, could never handle the hazards of a life in the Empire.

In Furse’s own judgment, a weak handshake or a jumpy temperament could be interpreted as windows into the soul. Only by spending a little time with a candidate, getting them one on one, did Furse intuitively believe he could determine whether a person was cut out for the job at hand. No examination, for instance, could test one’s ability to survive the rigors of colonial service, or test a man’s patience to its limits. No university course could prepare a person for the pressure that came with governance. In particular, Furse believed that C.S. men should be independent, self-sufficient, and confident enough to make spur of the moment decisions that could, quite literally, have a crucial bearing on the survival of the Empire. One future district officer who experienced first-hand the stresses of an interview with Furse described the meaning of the process, stating:

⁷² Furse, *Aucuparius*, 231; RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480

⁷³ *Ibid.*

He [Furse] wanted people who had learned at school the elements of leadership and to carry a little responsibility, and who had, at the university, learned to be sympathetic with the other man's point of view and yet to be detached and self-reliant... Especially he looked for men likely to have enough imagination to act on their own initiative and enough courage to carry the responsibility of doing so.⁷⁴

Finding qualified candidates relied on a very unequivocal devotion to identifying individuals who possessed more than just brilliance or high marks in school or at their university. Instead, Furse and his team sought qualities of fortitude. They desired to fill vacant positions with men who could think and act for themselves, and men who would be capable of making responsible, yet difficult decisions in the face of great adversity without needing affirmation.⁷⁵ In this way, Furse conceptualized his own definitions of character and leadership.

Significantly, Furse and his closest supporters deemed that applicants who embodied the desired traits could most easily be found in Britain's elite public schools and its prestigious universities.⁷⁶ By the late 19th century there existed in Britain specific educational institutions, which became generally associated as the "chief nurseries of British statesmen."⁷⁷ These schools represented the elite—the most exclusive and the very best Britain had to offer. Even as late as 1864, the British Government only officially recognized nine British public schools: Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Merchant Taylors', Rugby, St. Paul's, Shrewsbury, Westminster, and Winchester. At first glance, the most notable distinction that set these schools apart from others centered on their autonomy from Britain's state education system.⁷⁸ More importantly,

⁷⁴ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 28.

⁷⁵ RHO. Furse Papers. MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 415 "Minute in Response to Parliamentary Debates of 14 June, 1921." (24 June 1921); Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 29.

⁷⁶ Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*, 83. Also see, RHO. Papers of Robert Heussler. Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480, Box 1, file 3, folio 48. "Notes from Sir Charles Jeffries," June 22, 1960.

⁷⁷ Public Schools Commission, *Report* (Clarendon Report, 1864, I, 56 (Parliamentary Papers, 1864, 20), as quoted in Gary McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings: Education for Leadership in modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.

⁷⁸ Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*, 86-87.

though, these schools stood apart from the rest because the British intellectual establishment—and, generally, British society at large—historically recognized them as Britain’s ‘great schools’, a term that dated back to the beginning of the 18th century and referred to the institutions with the very best reputation in the country.⁷⁹ Tradition mandated that this elite club of boarding schools represented the breeding ground of the nation’s future leaders, a dogma that originated, in many instances, as early as the Middle Ages.⁸⁰

Furse’s view of the public school as the ideal training ground for future colonial civil servants originated from his own experience with these types of institutions. Furse attended one Britain’s most prestigious public schools, Eton College, for five years before entering Balliol College, Oxford in 1905.⁸¹ As his chief biographer, Robert Heussler put it, “he [Furse] did not do well academically...but he imbibed the spirit of Oxford and formed the impression, so vital to his career work, that no other institution quite equaled it in giving men the proper attitude to public service.” Heussler continued, saying that “He [Furse] saw Balliol as the perfect sequel to a Public School education and an ideal bridge to government service.”⁸² After graduating from Oxford in 1909, Furse went on to join the Colonial Office as an assistant private secretary of appointments, where he carried with him his appreciation for the ‘great schools’.⁸³ In an unpublished letter written to Heussler following his retirement, Furse admitted, “they [public

⁷⁹ London. His Majesty’s Stationery Office. *The Fleming Report*. “The Public Schools and the General Education System” (1944), 12.

⁸⁰ Winchester, for instance, was founded in 1382; Eton College first opened its doors in 1440; and St Paul’s school was established in 1509.

⁸¹ A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, ‘Furse, Sir Ralph Dolignon (1887–1973)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁸² Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 71.

⁸³ A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, ‘Furse, Sir Ralph Dolignon (1887–1973)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006

schools] are vital: we could not have run the show without them.”⁸⁴ The memoranda authored by Furse early in his career in the Colonial Office also support his belief in the superiority of the public school system in manufacturing the ideal colonial administrator. In a report on colonial service recruitment, written in 1920, Furse stated his conviction that these prestigious institutions were vital for “producing the personality and the character capable of handling natives well.”⁸⁵ As for secondary education, Furse argued that a first-class university education, namely from institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, provided “a man the best mental training and general outlook for the work we normally require of an administrative officer.”⁸⁶ In his own mind, each of these educational establishments served a primary purpose: public schools trained character and taught leadership, while universities developed the mind.⁸⁷

For Furse, there was no question that the future success of the C.S. depended upon a continuous supply of public school and university-educated candidates.⁸⁸ Although Furse would not automatically reject non-university or public school men, he clearly favored interviewees with such backgrounds over those without them. In a report written in January of 1920, Furse made clear his thoughts regarding the importance of one’s educational background. While nearly two-thirds of all men entering the Colonial Services in 1920 attended a public school and held a university degree, Furse admitted that he would “like to see that proportion be considerably higher.”⁸⁹ Much of his early efforts as a recruiter for the C.S. centered on attracting men of

⁸⁴ Unpublished letter from Furse to Huessler, August 15, 1960, as quoted in Huessler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 83.

⁸⁵ RHO. Furse Papers. “Report on recruitment,” 4 January 1920.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Furse to Huessler, August 15, 1960 as quoted in Huessler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 83.

⁸⁸ RHO. Furse Papers. “Report on recruitment,” 4 January 1920.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

character from the Oxbridge ranks and preparing them for work in administration.⁹⁰ As a result, Furse and his staff made a habit of keeping in near constant contact with the masters and headmasters of public schools and the dons of the prestigious universities.⁹¹

Along with these contacts, Furse surrounded himself with men of like mind throughout his career. One of the most influential figures in the development of Furse's system of recruitment for the Colonial Services was Hans Vischer. In the former's memoirs, Furse referred to Vischer fondly as "the one who, more than anyone else...opened my eyes to the potential scope of my job."⁹² Born in Basle, Switzerland in 1876 and immigrating with his family to Britain in his youth, Hans' family held the British public school system in high esteem. Hans once relayed to Furse that his father had considered the British public school system to be the "most powerful agency for preserving the ideals of chivalry in the modern world."⁹³ It is perhaps for this reason that Hans, himself, was sent to boarding school in Britain and, ultimately, to Emmanuel College, Cambridge.⁹⁴ Furse and Vischer shared the public school proclivity for the Greek ideal of training the whole man, with its emphasis on character, wisdom, sport, and integrity. The two came to work in close association together prior to the outbreak of the First World War when Vischer became a British citizen and went to work for the British Empire in 1903.⁹⁵

Of particular influence on the modern colonial story, was Vischer's emphasis on the concept of moral education. In a report published in the Colonial Office on February 1, 1915,

⁹⁰ RHO. Furse Papers, "Report on Education and Recruitment addressed to Sir G. Fiddes, Colonel Amery, and Lord Milner," 18 June 1919; Also see Ibid.

⁹¹ Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*, 84.

⁹² Furse, *Aucuparius*, 29.

⁹³ Ibid, 128.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 130.

Vischer wrote, “I consider moral instruction essential for the real success of our schools.”⁹⁶

Vischer’s own definition of ‘moral instruction’ revolved around an emphasis on making the formation of character the chief aim in education.⁹⁷ According to Vischer, the survival of success of the Empire depended on the acquisition of what he called the “right sort of men” for the colonial services. These men were, he attested, must not be men of brains, but of character, and he shared with Furse a conviction that the ‘right’ men could most easily be found in the Britain’s public schools, Oxford, and Cambridge.⁹⁸

Furse and Vischer’s confidence in these institutions as bearers of the “right sort of men,” though, was not an innovation directly attributable to Furse, himself; rather, his intuition stemmed from a deeply imbedded tradition of education in Britain, which arose during the early Victorian Era. Furse’s position as recruiter for the C.S., and the ideas he established while holding that position, represented the culmination of a much longer and more complex era of reform begun nearly a century earlier. Furse’s ideology was deeply intertwined with notions of ‘education for leadership’ entrenched during a transformative period for both British society and public school education. Rather than with Furse, it was in this period that the prototypical ideal of the government official first began to materialize.

While they had deep roots in English and, later British society, it was in the context of the age of revolutionary reform in the years after 1815 that the character and reputation of Britain’s public school system truly attained its bearing on the official mind. This educational revolution was first made possible by a social revolution, which established the precedent of the ‘great

⁹⁶ United Kingdom, The National Archives [TNA]. Kew. CO 583/43: NIGERIA, 1915: Original Correspondence. Hans Vischer to the Under Secretary of State in the Colonial Office, Feb. 1, 1915

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

schools' as crafters of moral character. Public school training and, more importantly, the ethos it instilled, created a well from which government employers, like Furse, could draw men who met their standards of service. By the end of the 19th century, the reputation of these schools became such that one's enrollment in them practically served as a vocational prerequisite for government service. In fact it was, as George Orwell recounted, "universally taken for granted...that unless you went to a 'good' public school you were ruined for life."⁹⁹ Joining the ranks of government or colonial service, though, meant more than just attending public school, it also meant adopting and embracing the code that these schools represented and aimed to impart on their pupils. The consequence, as Gary McCulloch has written, was one in which "public schools created an identifiable elite, a community of men with shared outlooks, values, and codes of honor imbued in them through their shared boyhood experience, a breed of 'philosopher kings' fit for public service and for running an empire."¹⁰⁰ It is to the origins of this process that we must now turn.

⁹⁹ George Orwell, *Essays* (London: Mariner Books, 1984), 425 as quoted in Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Gary McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings: Education for leadership in Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15; Also see, J.R. de S. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the English Public School in the Nineteenth-Century* (London: Millington Books Limited, 1977), 282.

Gentlemanly Indoctrination and its Origins:

Changing conceptions of class and leadership in mid 19th century Britain represent a core element in the formation of the British official mind. In the midst of the social changes that emanated out of the industrial revolution, notions of both citizenship and good governance changed drastically.¹⁰¹ Even until the 1870s land ownership served as the surest way to attain wealth and acquire power in the British State. Perhaps nowhere in the world was political influence so tied to land ownership as it was in the British Isles before 1867. In comparison to the rest of Europe, British aristocrats controlled a greater percentage of land, were, generally speaking, wealthier, and constituted a much smaller and much more exclusive segment of society.¹⁰² With few exceptions, an exclusive caste of aristocratic families constituted the core of Britain's governing class. Elitist, land owning, upper-class men dominated both Houses of Parliament—Commons and Lords—and held unmatched privileges in virtually all influential professions, including the military, navy, and the Anglican Church. As late as the 1860s, sixty land-owning families filled one-third of the House of Commons, and seventy-five percent of all MPs were patricians.¹⁰³ The courts, the officer corps of the army and navy, the religious orders, and the civil service were the favorite occupations of the younger sons of British nobility who sought positions worthy of their status and rank. In sum, this small body of oligarchs reigned supremely over all potential avenues of political influence.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ For instance, see Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall's, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender, and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰² David Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 14; M.L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 20-24.

¹⁰³ Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ For a more detailed indication of this fact see, Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Moreover, Britain's elite ruled over the Isles with a clearly identifiable ethos. As David Cannadine has illustrated, one of the most remarkable aspects of Britain's aristocracy was the extent of his class-consciousness. They were staunch in their belief that they were among God's elect, meant not only to rule, but also to serve their dependents. Whereas the French State had a tradition of absolutism centered upon the notion of the 'Divine Right of Kings,' Britain's own customs supported the creed of the 'Divine Right of Property.' As land-owners, British aristocrats were secure in their wealth and did not—or more specifically could not—work for a living, yet they “were very sensitive to matters of honor, precedence, and protocol... They possessed a strongly developed sense of liberality and hospitality,” and “they were concerned with voluntary service to the state, both locally and nationally, as civilians and as military men.”¹⁰⁵ As men with no need for supplementary sources of income, peers instead turned their attention to their perceived duties of state, as well as philanthropic endeavors. With a highly developed sense of paternalism, these men took leading roles in the British Government and within their local communities.¹⁰⁶ For generations, such qualities defined the British idea of a 'gentleman'. In the words of one French commentator, “these three syllables summarize the history of English society.”¹⁰⁷ Prior to the mid nineteenth-century, landed aristocrats acted as the arbiters of Britain's official mind. Made plain, Britain's strict social hierarchy inferred a naturally existing leadership wherein a very small, exclusive group of individuals had both the means and a perceived responsibility to oversee and protect their social inferiors. Long before British imperialists waved the banner of the civilizing mission abroad in the Empire, it was proudly displayed high above the country houses of British gentlemen.

¹⁰⁵ Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1689-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001). See, in particular, their section on the evolution of the gentlemanly order in Britain, 43-50.

¹⁰⁷ Taine, *Autobiography* (1888), as quoted in Briggs, *Age of Improvement*, 411.

What is more, until the second half of the nineteenth-century, the vast majority of Britain's population generally accepted the aristocrat's right to rule. Tradition endowed peers with the explicit authority to serve as Britain's 'natural governors.' As Cannadine rightly states, "landowners had leisure, confidence, experience, expertise: they had time to govern, they were expected to govern. The business of businessmen was business; the business of landowners was government."¹⁰⁸ Conventional wisdom held that it was not only the peer's right to rule, but that God naturally endowed him with the skills of leadership and qualities of wisdom and fairness. For generations, country gentlemen put these 'skills' to use in performing virtually all of the key functions of the state.

However, in the decades leading up to the Third Reform Act of 1884, the newly minted middle classes began hurling their first challenges at the historically accepted order.¹⁰⁹ After Waterloo, the political discourse increasingly alluded to the sentiment that reform had become necessary. In the words of one historian, "reform embraced every area of national life," and more and more Britons "applied it to all institutions which were being choked by the deadwood of venality, lassitude, and irrational veneration of the past."¹¹⁰ As it turned out, even the British system of oligarchic rule, deeply engrained as it had become, could not last forever. Ultimately, it was not a political revolution, but one that was, at once, economic, social, and technological that wrecked the established order. As historian Derek Fraser clearly illustrates, the industrial revolution prompted unprecedented challenges for both British society and the state. Rapid advances of industrialization and urbanization in the latter half of the nineteenth-century forced

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence James, *Aristocrats: Power, Grace, and Decadence: Britain's Great Ruling Classes from 1066 to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 2010), 186-187; Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 15

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 264.

Parliament to cater to the needs of new classes of people.¹¹¹ The first significant step in this process came with the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, which enfranchised more than 200,000 Britons who had previously been left with absolutely no political representation.¹¹² The earliest of the ‘Great Reform Acts’ signified the beginnings of the decline of the aristocracy, which was only accelerated with the Second Reform Act of 1867. Thus, as Fraser concludes, Queen Victoria’s reign served as a watershed not only with regard to Britain’s class system, but also its parliamentary system.¹¹³

Furthermore, competition from foreign markets and a shifting emphasis toward manufacturing devalued the ultimate source of patrician economic advantage, authority, and social standing in the years after 1880. In turn, the diminished profitability of agricultural property stripped elites of their monopoly on wealth, exacerbated their relationships with their tenants, and vastly diminished their stature in both social and political terms.¹¹⁴ The collapse of the agricultural economic base and the rise of industrialization politicized the masses, led to the proliferation of worker’s unions, and made mighty the power of the strike. In addition, the emerging centrality of capitalist, free trade values represented the death knell of landed interests, as Britain became dependent on exports for approximately half of the country’s national consumption. In the words of historians Cain and Hopkins this transformation, “represented a sublime faith in her [Britain’s] ability to export enough to pay for this burden.”¹¹⁵ In

¹¹¹ Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy Since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1973). Fraser examines the responses of the British Government to the changing social circumstances that emerged in Britain after the industrial revolution, arguing that such reforms paved the way for the creation of the Welfare State.

¹¹² James, *Aristocrats*, 274.

¹¹³ Fraser, *British Welfare State*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Cain and Hopkins, *Imperialism*, 109-111.

combination, all of these factors simply proved too much for peers to endure.¹¹⁶ The declining power of traditional elites created a power vacuum that was gradually filled by the recently enfranchised middle classes who happily assumed power from their aristocratic predecessors.

Historian Jose Harris' *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914*, expands upon Cannadine and Fraser's conclusions by proving this period to be a watershed also in British social and cultural development. She argues that the years after 1870 represented a dramatic break from pre-industrial British society and that many of the social changes in the post-war era after 1914 were merely products of the developments of the previous forty years. In opposition to E.P. Thompson, Harris contends that it was "the onset of mass production and the retailing and financial revolutions of the 1880s that created the distinctive class, status, and consumer groups which characterized British society for much of the twentieth-century."¹¹⁷ The 'old boy' system of nepotism, in which the patrician classes dominated the professions and the civil services, only survived as long as land and agriculture served as the primary sources of wealth and power.¹¹⁸ With the rise of entrepreneurship, finance, shipping, and other new and prominent industries, land was no longer king. As Britain slowly assumed its role as the workshop of the world, the official mind also slowly changed to reflect this new reality.

As land and aristocratic traditions of natural leadership faded, a new paradigm of order gradually rose up in its place. In particular, historians are generally in agreement that university and public school education became the new basis of power, status, and influence in the years

¹¹⁶ Cannadine, *Aristocracy*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 252-253.

¹¹⁸ Michael Young, *The Rise of Meritocracy* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 14.

after 1850.¹¹⁹ As the traditional patrician class fell from grace, the new middle class, educated elite assumed their own place as the leaders of British society, government, and the Empire. Although it would have been nearly impossible for the first generation industrialist to obtain a top-notch education at one of Britain's so-called 'great schools' or at Oxford or Cambridge—an honor exclusive to the land-owning classes—their sons' acceptance was an entirely different matter altogether. In short, the implication was that, in place of the old patrician class, a new breed of leader was born and trained in the Victorian educational system.

However, what many historians take for granted is that the old tendencies toward public service did not die out entirely with the landed elite. As historians Cain and Hopkins expressed, the ascendant classes were quickly swept up in the gentlemanly spirit of “chivalrous medievalism” and “the demand for ramparts and the armored rose.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, as Keith McClelland has argued, in the midst of these dramatic developments, the non-traditional governing classes set out to distinguish themselves as being capable of administrative responsibilities. In the words of one social commentator:

“England up until the War [WWI], and particularly until the Depression, still had a class structure, which was clearly demarcated, which was operative, and which was taken for granted by the majority of Englishmen. Whether it was a good or a bad structure is another matter: the essential point is that the class structure existed. This led to a preoccupation with the 'gentleman'. Money in itself did not count for everything. Status was what mattered.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ This interpretation is firmly established in the secondary literature. For example, see J.V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire*; Cannadine, *Aristocracy*; Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); Cain and Hopkins, *Imperialism*, 119. For a more contemporary vantage point, also see, RHO. Heussler Papers. File 7, Folio 15: H. Grose-Hodge, "Ends and Means of a Public School Education," talk given before Bedford School Mother's Guild, 22 June, 1960.

¹²⁰ Cain and Hopkins, *Imperialism*, 45; Also see, Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, 51.

¹²¹ RHO. Heussler Papers. Box 2: File 6, Folio 16: Letter from W.R. Crocker, 16 August, 1960s

The ‘Age of Reform’ ushered in the maxim that only the “respectable working man” ought to be given the right to vote.¹²² While MPs altered the nature of Britain’s constitutional system, there still remained a conscious commitment to the idea of respectability, in which the “sober and respectable” attempted to distance themselves from the “ignorant and rough” elements of the working class.¹²³ In innumerable ways newly active middle class men and women attacked social ills and what they perceived to be glaring weaknesses in society. Such rampant politicization is evidenced by the proliferation of countless associations, pamphlets, lobbyist groups, and so forth, committed to attacking everything from prostitution to idleness, to the African slave trade.

As such, many of the same values and philosophies that had guided the old generations of ‘natural governors’ evolved as newly wealthy factory owners sent their sons into the public school system and to the prominent universities. Here, a new sense of duty, leadership, and paternalism were now, through new methods, being transplanted to an entirely different class of leader. In the aftermath, it was no longer the country estate, but the school house that forged the ethos of British leadership and informed the official mind. New generations of Oxbridge men might not, according to the traditional understanding, come from the ‘right’ families, but Victorian educators held that ideas of leadership, service, and gentlemanly behavior could rub off on the sons of the middle classes as they attended these elitist institutions.¹²⁴ As this new middle class had difficulty breaking in to the land-owning aristocracy, no matter their education, they needed a new outlet for the talents and for their training—their outlet was Empire.

¹²² Keith McClelland in *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 71.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Notes from a discussion with Sir Charles Jeffries,” File 3, folio 48, 22 June, 1960.

Thus, the chief aim of British education was to teach the sons of industrialists how to become gentleman and to embody all that this term implied.¹²⁵ In essence, *instilled* leadership replaced the old notion of natural leadership. Former headmaster of Bedford school, Humfrey Grose-Hodge, perfectly described this transformation, in a talk given to a group of students at Oxford in June of 1960. Hodge argued the very meaning of the term ‘gentleman’ in the British context changed dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth-century. In pre-industrial Britain, gentlemanly behavior was bred; it was passed down from generation to generation through the blood lines of a very select group of families; in no realm of the imagination did anyone dream that the qualities of gentlemanly conduct could be learned. This was the very thing that made Britain’s aristocracy so unique and, indeed, so exclusive—an emphasis on bloodlines and hereditary titles ensured that governance and administration remained the exclusive hobbies of a privileged few.¹²⁶ For Hodge, though, the new, post-industrial definition of a gentleman was

... a man of whatever ancestry who possesses the scale of values and the personal qualities which were once thought proper, and even peculiar, to a man of family, and which constitute the ethical side of culture.

It was not so much that the definition of the term changed—it was still rooted in ideas of Christianity, leadership, service, chivalry, and the like; perhaps, a better explanation would be to say that the ‘gentlemanly ideal’ evolved during Queen Victoria’s reign and was re-shaped to conform to new social parameters. As the Scottish author and reformer, Samuel Smiles, wrote in 1859, ‘true gentlemen’ were still able to

... look each other in the eye and grasp each other’s hands... they know each other instinctively... They would no more think of using power for unworthy aims than of

¹²⁵ Cannadine, *Aristocracy*; Kwasi Kwarteng’s, *Ghosts of Empire*.

¹²⁶ M.L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 35; Ibid, 20.

allowing themselves to forget strict self-control. Such a picture was based not on observation but on rooted belief in a moral code, on the world of *ought*, not on the world of *is*.¹²⁷

Although the new ideals of gentlemanly behavior in the latter part of the nineteenth-century had similarities to the notions of natural leadership engrained in the minds of aristocrats, the new conceptions of instilled leadership were more purposeful, more clearly conceived, and aimed far beyond Britain's own shores. In the very same decades that the British were coming to terms with the power they inherited in the post-Waterloo environment, Britons were also dealing with a transfer of power in their own country into the hands of a new breed of gentleman.

Moreover, with the rise of the influence of the 'gentlemanly' middle classes also came the preeminence of liberal principles. For instance, historian P.J. Cain vividly demonstrates the effect of middle class, liberal ideals on both the administration of the home front, as well as the Empire. Cain argues that British liberals believed their country's success to be firmly connected to their early adoption of what Cain calls "Ordered Liberty." In taking a Whiggish approach to their country's history, Cain explains that liberty—meaning the triumph of the rule of law and parliamentary representation—served as "the very essence of British national identity" throughout the better part of the nineteenth-century.¹²⁸ Cain contends that, thanks to the influence of liberalism and its offshoots, Britain's new leaders became intensely focused on the moral obligations of government, which meant protecting and advancing the values of "Ordered Liberty" both within their shores and beyond the seas.¹²⁹ As such, Cain makes clear that it was

¹²⁷ Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859) as quoted in Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, 411.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 559.

¹²⁹ Peter J. Cain, "Character, 'Ordered Liberty', and the Mission to Civilize: British Moral Justification for Empire, 1870-1914." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40 (4), 557-578. In this article, Cain is specifically addressing the conclusions of historian, Karunea Mantena, who argued that, by the late 19th century, liberalism imperialism represented a mere alibi for continued British rule in the Empire. Cain counters this conclusion by showing that

only natural for new these leaders to carry liberal conceptions with them as they attempted to administer their Empire.¹³⁰

The spirit of liberalism loudly proclaimed by the rising middle classes—inspired by intellectuals like James Mill and his son, John Stuart—championed an active participation in politics. John Stuart made clear that the new ‘owning’ classes could only “reach the full potential of [their] lives and personality by participation in the affairs of the *polis* (city state).”¹³¹ For the newly enfranchised, citizenship now meant something entirely different; no longer was it merely a dream to participate in public service, by the second half of the nineteenth-century an active engagement in governance served as both an obligation and a duty for the British middle class. In short, civic spirit and civic engagement became the buzzwords of the day.¹³² This enthusiasm for administration soon meshed with romantic conceptions about the history and the nature of the British governing establishment. More than class, more than race, there was no greater influence on British perceptions of the world from the 1840s to the 1930s than morality. Among Britain’s new governing classes, moral vitality was more highly valued than wealth, privilege, material success, skin color, or breeding.¹³³

The slums of British industrial towns, as well as its imperial outposts, for the first time, provided Britain’s new gentlemen with a place to both lead and to serve. The first and most accessible target for the middle classes to try their hand at a civilizing mission of their own were

British dedication to liberal imperialism, and its inherently paternalistic ethos, was alive and well throughout the nineteenth-century; Cain and Hopkins, *Imperialism*, 127. Here Cain and Hopkins make clear their assertion that a national perception of ‘gentlemanly values’ represented a core aspect of the official mind.s

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ J.S. Mill, as quoted in Brad Beavens and John Griffiths, “Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870-1939,” *Contemporary British History*, 22 (2), 2008, 206.

¹³² Ibid, 206.

¹³³ J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic of Imperialism*, 51.

Britain's own working class poor. In an editorial in the *London Times* in May of 1867, one individual wrote

Who would not be the English working man? He is the spoilt child of the great British family. Though very well able to take care of himself and with strong notions of independence, we are all striving to take him by the hand and do him some good or other. We build institutions for him, we present him with books, pictures, and models, we read to him, and preach to him, we teach him to make societies, we are bringing the franchise to his door and laying it on his table, if he will but rise from his chair and take it.¹³⁴

Even before the 1880s, there was a hope among many that the working man would, with the guidance of the middle class, mature into a 'civilized' member of society. If one did not know better, it could be assumed that this same statement might be written of some subject of the Empire. Ultimately, with great ease, the middle classes carried over these ideas to Britain's imperial territories. It was, as historian Eric Stokes has written about Britain in India:

The fierce, downright exterior, the instinct for his own caste and race, the consciousness of his own religion, the sense of moral code and a constant dwelling of under an unwritten law of duty, the eager and crude intellectual appetite—all the images of the imagination must summon to picture the Englishman of the early Victorian age in India, are really drawn from English social history.¹³⁵

For historians Cain and Hopkins, "The empire was a superb arena for gentlemanly endeavor, the ultimate testing ground for the idea of responsible progress, for the battle against evil, for the performance of duty, and for the achievement of honor."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ *The London Times*, 2 May 1867 as quoted in Beavens and Griffiths, "Creating the Exemplary Citizen," 207.

¹³⁵ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), *xiii*.

¹³⁶ Cain and Hopkins, *Imperialism*, 47.

Not Scholars, but Men:

Dr. Thomas Arnold, clergyman, social critic, and headmaster of Rugby school from 1828 to 1842 is most often regarded as the catalyst responsible for laying the groundwork for the model Victorian school.¹³⁷ Arnold was a part of an intellectual milieu that, after Waterloo, took Britain's new place of predominance in the world extremely seriously. In particular, many of the country's spiritual and intellectual elite understood Britain's unparalleled position of power and prestige as a gift bestowed upon the British people by God's Divine Providence.¹³⁸ They viewed their country's ascendancy, like every other gift from on High, not as mere gratuity, but as a trust. With great power, they argued, came the charge to do good. These intellectual pioneers thought it better that Britain should possess no authority at all, than to use their strength improperly. Arnold stood as one of the earliest and most vocal representatives of this line of thinking.¹³⁹ In a letter to the editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Education* in January of 1835, Arnold wrote, "power has been so constantly perverted that it has come to be generally suspected. Liberty has been so constantly unjustly restrained, that it has been thought impossible that it should ever be indulged too freely."¹⁴⁰ In recourse to this blatant failure, Arnold used his time at Rugby to fundamentally alter the purpose and approach of education.¹⁴¹ He aimed to

¹³⁷ This is true at both official and scholarly levels. See, *The Fleming Report*. "The Public Schools and the General Education System" (1944), 17; Cyril Norwood, *The English Tradition of Education* (London: John Murray, 1929), 16-18; and Simon and Bradley, *The Victorian Public School*.

¹³⁸ Arthur Stanley, ed. *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold: Collected and Republished* (London: T. Fellowes, 1845), 226.

¹³⁹ T.W. Bramford, "Thomas Arnold and the Victorian Idea of a Public School" in Simon and Bradley, *The Victorian Public School*, 62.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 355

¹⁴¹ *The Fleming Report*. "The Public Schools and the General Education System" (1944), 17; Produced just under a century after Arnold's death, *The Fleming Report* was one of the most thorough assessments of the British Public School system of the 20th century. The authors of the

shape at his institution new generations of individuals who could exercise authority with restraint, humility, and justice. If Britons at home and across the Empire were not to fall victim to the temptations of power, Arnold concluded, there was no choice but to train them from an early age to become inherently incorruptible and capable of principled leadership.

Although his testing ground was Britain's public school system, Arnold, as a man of the cloth, did not view himself solely as an educationalist; his primary concerns were less pedagogical and more focused on Christian virtue and the moral failures that plagued British society.¹⁴² The contribution of he and his followers, therefore, must be seen not solely in the light of educational reform, but as a force that shaped British identity and, ultimately, helped frame the official mind. While his life's work centered on teaching and, more specifically, on making Britain and its people better Christians, Arnold's larger concerns ultimately pivoted on social and political improvement.¹⁴³ He meant public school education to be a means to a very particular end. What Britain needed more than anything else at the moment, Arnold judged, was leadership, and as T.W. Bamford has correctly asserted, "it was his [Arnold's] deeply held conviction that leadership was a moral concept involving commitment and example, acting in a moral manner, and working in a democratic way for the benefit of the administered."¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, as Arnold himself put it, the "highest earthly desire of the ripened mind" should be "the great work of government."¹⁴⁵ Once he assumed his role as headmaster at Rugby, Arnold insisted upon an

report remembered Arnold as the person "to whom more than any other man" was owed thanks for the high standing of Britain's public schools.

¹⁴² Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 2.

¹⁴³ Simon Heffer, *High Minds: The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain* (London: Random House Books, 2013), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Bamford, *Thomas Arnold and the Victorian Public School*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Arthur P. Stanley, ed. *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold* (Oxford: B. Fellowes, 1844).

element of reform, which he intended to be “deep, searching, and universal.”¹⁴⁶ Such reform must, he proclaimed, “extend to the church and state, to the army, navy, law, trade, and education; to our political and social institutions; to our habits, principles, and practice both as citizens and men.”¹⁴⁷

However, when he assumed the headmastership at Rugby in 1828, Arnold encountered a great many obstacles, which initially hindered the implementation of his vision. At the time of Arnold’s employment at Rugby, Britain’s public school system had fallen into disrepair. Anarchy, brutality, violence, and abuse had become synonymous with student life within Britain’s ‘great schools’. The conditions Arnold found at his and other influential institutions convinced him that Britain’s educational system, in its current state, was in no condition to create the kind of leader he envisioned.¹⁴⁸ Thus, before generations of pupils could be sent out into the world, instilled with gentlemanly, Christian valor, Arnold knew his institution (and others like it) had to be re-made.

In particular, corporal punishment, known as flogging, served as one of the most damning practices in public schools, as it proved to be a favorite pastime of headmasters and other officials in the early 19th century. When Arnold took up his position of authority at Rugby, headmaster’s typically ruled their institutions by fear. In 1832, for instance, Arnold’s contemporary at Eton College, John Keate, flogged eighty boys in a single day, an extreme example even at a time when mass floggings were anything but uncommon.¹⁴⁹ Conditions were often such that students viewed their headmasters as cruel tyrants who reigned through the terror

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, as quoted in Honey, *Tom Brown’s Universe*, 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Colin Shrobbree, *Public Schools and Private Education* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 18.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

of the rod. A boy might be beaten bloody for an offense as innocent as forgetting his athletic shoes, stumbling over a line of Virgil, or making even the slightest sound after curfew. Further, punishment might prove exceptionally ruthless for an act deemed more treacherous, such as insubordination or rebellion. An account of the heavy-handed practices applied at Winchester in the *Quarterly Journal of Education* in 1835 reported that it was commonplace for boys to “hide themselves...or even pretend illness in order to escape the odious tyranny” of their masters.¹⁵⁰ The prominence of such brutality drew both public and professional condemnation from across Britain.

Charles Dickens provides an excellent depiction of these sentiments in his fictional, but nonetheless influential, account of the public school experience, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickelby*. Dickens masterfully portrays the harsh conditions of early 19th century boarding school life and the brutal punishment that often ensued from even the most minimal of offenses.¹⁵¹ Dickens’ fictitious description of Dotheboys Hall outlines in graphic detail the gross abuses of students and faculty alike. In part, Dickens’ own inspiration to write his novel originated from his personal desire to expose what he believed to be the evils of Britain’s boarding school system. Dickens described schoolmasters as “ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog.”¹⁵² The most vivid imagery of Dotheboys Hall comes as Dickens described his main character Nicholas Nickelby’s first glimpse of Dotheboys and its inhabitants:

But the pupils - the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of

¹⁵⁰ Anonymously signed, ‘A Wykhamist’, “Fagging and Flogging at Winchester” *Quarterly Journal of Education* Vol. 9 (No. 17) (1835).

¹⁵¹ Schrosbree, 10.

¹⁵² Charles Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickelby* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1839), 7.

Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre [*sic*] legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together... There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining... With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here!¹⁵³

Certainly, Dickens added his own literary flare to his vivid depiction of Dotheboys; yet such was the mental picture formulated in the minds of many Britons who envisaged boarding school life in the early 19th century; and such could often times be the harsh reality. Contemporaries of these schools, likewise, confirmed these same sentiments. According to Kenneth Bradley, a product of the Victorian school tradition, the harsh treatment inflicted on boys at these institutions generally led to their assuming an unadulterated fear and hatred of all those in authority.¹⁵⁴

In addition to their being ruled with an iron fist, Britain's public schools were also very often the home of vigilantism and 'student justice.' In another incident during Keate's tenure at Eton in 1825, a boy named E.A. Cooper (the younger brother of the prominent parliamentarian, Lord Shaftesbury) was beaten to death following an altercation with another pupil.¹⁵⁵ After an initial disagreement and on the urging of their classmates, the two boys scheduled a boxing match to settle their quarrel. In the ensuing scuffle, which reportedly lasted nearly two hours, Cooper and his opponent were encircled by their peers and encouraged to assault one another until only the victor remained standing. In between rounds, the two foes consumed shots of brandy until finally, more than a dozen rounds in, the younger and smaller Cooper could take no

¹⁵³ Ibid, 67.

¹⁵⁴ Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ *The Times* (London, England), "Coroner's Inquest", Thursday, Mar 03, 1825; pg. 3; Issue 12591.

more. At the end of the contest, Cooper's brother and some friends carried his broken, battered and unconscious body to bed. By morning Cooper was dead. Initially, Eton's leadership was less than forthcoming about the incident, fraudulently insinuating that Cooper died as a result of alcohol poisoning.¹⁵⁶ It was not until the city coroner published his report that the true cause of death became known: blunt-force-trauma to the head. The court subsequently charged two students with manslaughter, and Eton's reputation, along with the rest of Britain's like-minded public schools, was further tarnished.¹⁵⁷

In such troubling times, Arnold stressed that Britain's public school system demanded a profound renovation of its tactics *and* its reputation. In particular, at Rugby he subordinated the implementation of corporal punishment to other methods he viewed as being more productive to character development. Arnold became an outspoken critic of senseless brutality and heavy-handedness within the school system. In one instance during the early years of his tenure at Rugby, a considerable controversy arose regarding the harsh treatment endured by students at Winchester College.¹⁵⁸ The scandal was such that Arnold, himself, felt obliged to address the issue in a letter to the editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Education*. Arnold wrote, "we [at Rugby] have nothing to do with arguments against the excessive or indiscriminate use of such a punishment..."¹⁵⁹ Arnold differed from his predecessors in that he aimed to win the allegiance of his boys rather than flog them into subjection.¹⁶⁰ The real tragedy brought to light by the activities at Winchester and Eton, Arnold believed, "was not its [flogging's] cruelty, but its

¹⁵⁶ Herbert Scholssberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 108-9.

¹⁵⁷ *The Times* (London, England), "Coroner's Inquest", Thursday, Mar 03, 1825; pg. 3

¹⁵⁸ Anonymously signed, 'A Wykhamist', "Fagging and Flogging at Winchester" *Quarterly Journal of Education* Vol. 9 (No. 17) (1835).

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Arnold, "On the Discipline of Schools," *Quarterly Journal of Education* Vol.10 (No. 18) (1835), 86-7.

¹⁶⁰ Shrobbree, *Public Schools and Private Education*, 18-20.

inefficiency.” He bemoaned to the editor of the journal the folly of the punishment being inflicted at such institutions and complained that it “was so frequent and so slight as to inspire very little of terror or shame.”¹⁶¹

Yet, despite this stance, Arnold maintained that the total elimination of corporal punishment was, in fact, not the answer. Far worse than the act of flogging, Arnold argued, was its misuse. Brutality and arbitrary punishment so often employed in the schools of his day, he wrote, inspired neither apprehension, nor dishonor and, thus, brought about little improvement in a young man’s character. Arnold contended that flogging, when used properly, served as a capable asset in the instruction of students:

‘Corporal punishment’, it is said, ‘is degrading’. I well know of what feeling this is the expression; it originates in that proud notion of personal independence, which is neither reasonable nor Christian, but essentially barbarian...Punishment inflicted by a master for the purposes of correction, is in no true sense of the word degrading; nor is it the more degrading for being corporal...To destroy fear of pain altogether, even if practicable, would be but a doubtful good...Perfect love of good is the only thing, which can profitably cast out all fear. In the meanwhile, what is the course of true wisdom? Not to make a boy insensible to bodily pain, but to make him dread evil more; so that fear will do its proper appointed work, without so going beyond it as to become cowardice. It is cowardice to fear pain or danger more than neglect duty, or than the commission of evil; but it is useful to fear them, when they are but the accompaniments or the consequences of folly or faults.¹⁶²

This is the first crucial element of Arnoldian pedagogy, which eventually permeated every aspect of Victorian education in the second half of the nineteenth-century. Arnold’s standard, his integral vision for sound administration and “the great work of government” sprung from his own concern with producing students who genuinely adopted a perfect love of good *and*, equally important, an absolute abhorrence of the neglect of duty or moral failing. His central determination was to identify the means to inculcate these values into his students. He

¹⁶¹ Arnold, “On the Discipline of Schools,” *Quarterly Journal of Education*, 87-88.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

deemed the old system of public school education, which revolved around rule by fear, as counterproductive to his ultimate aims. If a boy erred in his behavior, Arnold believed the object of the schoolmasters or the headmaster should be to make the student feel ashamed of the *action*.¹⁶³ The key difference in Arnold's approach to corporal punishment was one of emphasis. Ignominious flogging, he held, incorrectly placed the shame on the punishment, not the *fault*. Students, Arnold postulated, should not behave out of a reaction to fear of bodily harm but, instead, should be guided by a sense of what was *right*. In Arnold's estimation, repeated physical discipline and abuse only made boys numb—they learned to take their licks without actually altering their behavior. Arnold aspired to remedy this failure by molding students who feared the neglect of duty and morality far more than fear of physical or emotional pain. Additionally, Arnold lauded boys who embraced pain and agony in defense of what was just. The requirement, then, he reasoned, was not a complete and total abandonment of corporal punishment in schools; rather, there required a fundamental re-thinking of its exercise.

Gradually, under Arnold's supervision, the barbarous anarchism of school life gave way to a more standardized method of discipline and order, one that was much more in tune with Arnold's vision for public school education.¹⁶⁴ Arnold's own contribution to this process stemmed first from his alteration of the relationship between student and master. Whereas, before Arnold, the standard practice of British schools was rule by the rod, at Rugby Arnold

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Cyril Norwood, *The English Tradition of Education* (London: John Murray, 1929), 16-18; Also see, Shrosbree, *Public Schools and Private*, 18. This is, of course, not to say that all forms of corporal punishment were eliminated from school life, nor was heavy-handedness on the part of the school masters eliminated. John Beames, for instance, who attended Merchant Taylors from 1847 to 1855 reported that he went home many nights with his "shirt sticking to his back with blood which had congealed on it" from canings he received from his teachers. For more on this see, for instance, John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian, 1837-1902* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), 45.

attempted to fundamentally change the perception of the headmaster and his staff in the minds of students. Instead of being feared, Arnold promoted a much more open association between pupil and headmaster, especially between the masters and the oldest and most skilled boys. Notably, he thought of Rugby as a kind of alternative family.¹⁶⁵ Arnold's commitment to this process can be observed in his writings on the subject just four years into his tenure as headmaster of Rugby in 1834:

It is true that youth require discipline to accustom them to the observance of duty: but the constraint of discipline can only produce an observance of duties imposed by external circumstances; much more important is it to [*sic*] cultivate an inward sense of duty resting in, and proceeding from the mind. Constraining, through fear, can only weaken this moral sense or suppress it altogether. All the faculties of our mind grow strong only from being exercised; if, therefore, the young mind be constantly forced to the performance of duties by the master's will alone, no exercise is given to its own impulse, to a desire of doing what the understanding points out to be right...the inward sense of duty is chiefly fostered by friendship and esteem.¹⁶⁶

So, far more than rule by fear, Arnold restructured the image of the headmaster in the minds of his pupils as someone who was approachable and endearing, not intimidating and cruel.

Likewise, Arnold came to expect his schoolmasters and teachers to develop a vested interest in the welfare of their students. They were to love their pupils as a father loved and raised his children, serving as a moral guide and teacher.¹⁶⁷ Only in this way, Arnold argued, could students truly develop a genuine desire to pursue good of their own accord—character could not be taught, only caught. Gentlemanly conduct couldn't be beaten into students, instead it had to be adopted willingly and be engrained into a boy's subconscious.

Even more substantial than his renovation of the reputation of school administrators was Arnold's overhaul of the so-called monitorial system or, as it is perhaps more commonly known,

¹⁶⁵ Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 22-23.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Arnold, "Rugby School," *The Quarterly Journal of Education* vol. 7 (January to April, 1834), 41-2.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 36-7.

the prefect system. In its simplest terms, the prefect system refers to a method of student administration by which the headmaster delegated powers of governance (and punishment) to senior students with a reputation—in this order—for leadership, physical prowess, and intellectual abilities. Older boys, logic implied, had multiple years of experience and knowledge of school life and the requirements therein, and were presumed wiser and more self-controlled; thus, school administrators, like Arnold, granted certain boys regulatory powers over younger, more impressionable students. In essence, this system equated to a kind of ‘boy government’.¹⁶⁸ While Arnold certainly did not invent this practice (he, himself, served as a prefect during his own school days at Winchester), he revolutionized its employment at Rugby and entrenched it as the cornerstone of school discipline and organization for whole generations of public school pupils of the late 19th century and early 20th centuries.¹⁶⁹

Arnold first emphasized the necessity of amplifying the prefect system due to the near permanency of student residence on school grounds. Generally between the ages of nine and sixteen (sometimes eighteen), public school boys spent the better part of nine months out of the year living amongst one another—this was far more time than they spent living even in their own homes. A boy’s school life represented nearly the whole of his existence; it was *the* predominant society to which he belonged.¹⁷⁰ Given this fact, Arnold reasoned that, as with any other society, a clearly visible hierarchy was crucial to keep order.¹⁷¹ An institution or headmaster, even with

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 18.

¹⁶⁹ Norwood, *The English Tradition of Education*, 15. Sir Cyril Norwood, himself headmaster of Harrow from 1926-1934, credits Arnold with the foundation of the prefect system in its modern, form. Norwood wrote that, before Arnold, fagging had only proved to be a shell of what it was meant to be and had long remained highly ineffective. Also see, Shrobsbree, *Public Schools and Private Education* 23; Honey, *Tom Brown’s Universe*, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Arnold, “On the Discipline of Schools, *Quarterly Journal of Education* Vol.10 (No. 18) (1835), 286-7.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 286.

the best resources or intentions, could hardly produce men of high character if disorder reigned within school walls. The monitorial system of student administration provided another practical means of maintaining control and protecting the efficiency of the school but, far more than that, Arnold constructed the prefect system at Rugby as the basis for his larger aims of instilling gentlemanly conduct and moral administration into the day-to-day lives of his students. Arguably, the most formative seven years of a boy's life were spent living at school, amongst other boys. This kind of communal living allowed Arnold the opportunity to employ a system of internal self-government as a means of molding his own notions of character into a captive audience. Arnold and those who followed him purposefully meant the monitorial system to give young pupils early experience in self-government and in the exercise of power.¹⁷²

Prefects were not simply the oldest or most experienced boys in the schools, they were also most often the boys with the best reputation, generally proscribed by their adult supervisors as being those who were, in the words of Arnold

The most respectable in application and general character—those who have made the best use of the opportunities which the school affords, and are most capable of entering into its objects. In short, they constitute a real aristocracy, a government of the most worthy, their rank itself being an argument of their deserving. And their business is to keep order amongst the boys; to put a stop to improprieties of conduct, especially to prevent that oppression and ill-usage of the weaker boys by the stronger...¹⁷³

Here, in this single thought, we are provided with a great deal more than just Arnold's thoughts on the prefect system, but his overall outlook regarding administration and his ideology for the exercise of power. Ultimately, Arnold aimed to set the standard that public school life represented a microcosm of adult life.¹⁷⁴ At the outset, Arnold meant the prefectorial hierarchy to

¹⁷² *Fleming Report*, 47.

¹⁷³ Arnold, "On the Discipline of Schools," 287.

¹⁷⁴ Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers*, 90.

create a government apparatus that trained boys to behave independently, without the direct supervision of their superiors.

The prefect system encouraged individualism; it taught self-reliance; and it emphasized self-restraint. What set Arnold's system apart from its traditional manifestation was its emphasis on granting students, on the basis of character, the freedom to regulate their small society themselves with only minimal oversight from school officials. Furthermore, Arnold established this method of administration as a means of protecting younger boys and those deemed weak and meager. In placing boys of strong character in positions of power, Arnold removed the influence and authority of the bully who, in the past, terrorized others by physical strength alone. Older boys of experience guided the younger, more vulnerable students. Describing his first impressions upon arriving at Haileybury College in 1896, at the age of thirteen years old, John Rutherford Parkin Postlethwaite remembered

I feel most men would agree that one's first arrival at a resident public school is certainly one of the most outstanding experiences which live in one's memory. I found myself there of little interest to anybody except myself, perhaps for the first time in my life. I was seen by my Housemaster who, after a few suitable words, handed me over to a boy older than myself. He took me to my House, where he told me some of the failings I should probably display, which, if persisted in, would in due course result in some form of personal discomfort at the hands of my elders and betters.¹⁷⁵

As Postlethwaite's account illustrates, a boy's acclimation to the system typically began on day one. From the outset, the structure forced the young man to fill the role assigned to him, and older boys guided him to that end. Under this framework, boys' lives improved because senior students no longer had to assert their superiority by bullying, fighting, or other types of misbehavior; rather prefects and monitors earned their positions through an exercise of their own

¹⁷⁵ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 12. Haileybury, although not technically one of the nine public schools listed above, was considered to be of the same crust. It had similar standards of 'education for leadership' by the later 19th century.

virtue. Furthermore, Arnold's emphasis on establishing close working relationships with his prefects and monitors allowed him to personally influence this 'boy government' by working alongside his young administrators. The result was often that, instead of bullying, the prefect system promoted self-restraint; instead of anarchy, it promoted stability and order; rather than rule of the strong, it established a rule by character.

Certainly, one did not have to look far for abuses in this system. Neither Arnold, nor any other headmaster ever fully eliminated excessive punishment, favoritism, or bullying from public school life, and one can easily identify instances of prefectorial tyranny.¹⁷⁶ However, examples of this kind do little to detract from the reality that, in the majority of cases, prefects and school monitors took their positions very seriously and adopted, in all but the most extreme cases, the necessary self-restraint that the system intended. The earnestness with which boys accepted their posts is best illustrated by the words of Postlethwaite, who stated,

I may be wrong, but I feel that no great statesman or great commander-in-chief can ever have the same feeling of exaltation as a small boy has when, for a brief period he becomes the head of his House at an English public school, with the knowledge that a small body of his fellow scholars regard him in the light of a far greater personage than any master can possibly hope to be.¹⁷⁷

In the words of another scholar, prefects often learned a crucial lesson very quickly that "he [the prefect] was most likely to win consent [of the other students] if he wore the mantle of authority lightly and pursued a policy of minimum government."¹⁷⁸ By the 1880s the Arnoldian reforms had infiltrated Eton and many pupils reported that "most prefects learned the advantage of a

¹⁷⁶ For more on this, see Norman Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 72-3; Wilkinson, *The Prefects*, 31.

¹⁷⁷ Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 15.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 32.

‘light touch’ in dealing with their peers.¹⁷⁹ In this way, even amongst the students themselves, boys were capable of keeping the existence of prefectorial tyranny to a minimum.

In addition to the prefect system, another of Arnold’s preferred methods of instilling the qualities of the ‘Christian Gentleman’ into his pupils emanated from his belief in the ubiquity of classical languages and the texts of the ancient Greeks and Romans.¹⁸⁰ Although classical studies were nothing new to the public school system when Arnold assumed his role as headmaster, he proved to be the first in the line of a generation of educators who emphasized their influence as beacons of morality and, therefore, models to be imitated. In 1845 Arnold confessed, “wide as is the difference between us [Britons and the Ancients] with respect to those physical instruments which minister to our uses or our pleasures...in our moral and political views, and in those matters which most determine human character, there is perfect resemblance.”¹⁸¹ For Arnold, the lessons of the great philosophers of Greece and Rome were timeless vehicles of morality.¹⁸² He countered anyone who might argue against the merits of a classical education. In an essay written while he served at Rugby, Arnold reasoned that “Aristotle, and Plato, and Thucydides, and Cicero, and Tacitus are most untruly called ancient writers; they are virtually our own countrymen and contemporaries.”¹⁸³ Accordingly, Arnold mandated that the education of his pupils at Rugby revolve around these texts:

...Although some provision is undoubtedly made at Rugby for acquiring knowledge of modern history...the history of Greece and Rome is more studied than that of France and England; and Homer and Virgil are certainly much more attended than Shakespeare and Milton... Expel Greek and Latin from your schools, and you confine the views of the

¹⁷⁹ C.E. Pascoe, *Everyday life in our Public Schools* (London: Griffin and Faran, 1881), 23 as cited in Wilkinson, *The Prefects*, 32.

¹⁸⁰ Honey, *Tom Brown’s Universe*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Arnold, “On the Discipline of Schools, *Quarterly Journal of Education* Vol.10, 346.

¹⁸² Honey, *Tom Brown’s Universe*, 10.

¹⁸³ Thomas Arnold, “Rugby School,” *The Quarterly Journal of Education* vol. 7 (January to April, 1834), 240-1.

existing generation to themselves and their immediate predecessors: you will cut off so many centuries of the world's experience, and place us in the same state as if the human race had first come into existence in the year 1500.¹⁸⁴

In this vein, Arnold believed in the transcendence of classical studies as agencies of culture and morality.¹⁸⁵ Classical studies, Arnold reasoned, naturally inculcated students with the qualities he held so dear—morality, good governance, and moral behavior.

Plato's *Republic* represented the foundation for Arnold and all the educationalists of his creed that would follow him.¹⁸⁶ Plato suggested in his writings that choosing young men at an early age, training them, and intently ingraining within them the qualities of leadership stood as the most efficient and reliable way to craft responsible administrators in a community.¹⁸⁷ Just as Plato's philosopher-kings defined the Greek ideal administrator so too, Arnold envisioned, would a similar kind of figure arise in England to serve its people and its empire. However, not only did Plato's writings serve as the model of public school education, they also acted as a major part of the curriculum. For instance, in their daily studies, schoolboys learned the lessons of Plato's Er the Pamphylian by heart. They read how, after being mortally wounded in battle, Er's body lay in tact on a funeral pyre for eleven days. On the twelfth day, Er returned to life, imparting stories of his otherworldly experiences. In the climax of his account, Er described watching twelve spirits choose their fate in life, with the noblest spirit choosing power as his destiny. Innumerable public school boys committed to memory the great lesson of this story:

...Virtue is free, and as a man honors or dishonors her he will have more or less of her; the responsibility is with the chooser...he will then look at the nature of the soul, and

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 10.

¹⁸⁶ McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings*, 11. For a more contemporary view of this sentiment see Maurice Zinkin (ed.), "The Indian Civil Service: Survivors Remember the Raj" *Indo-British Review: A Journal of History*, Vol. XXII (No. 1-2), Parts I & 2, especially Philip Mason's, "Setting the Scene", 7-11.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

from the consideration of all these qualities he will be able to determine which is the better and which is the worse; and so he will choose, giving the name of evil to the life which will make his soul more unjust, and good to the life which will make his soul more just; all else he will disregard... A man must take with him into the world below an adamant faith in truth and right, that there too he may be undazzled [*sic*] by the desire of wealth or the other allurements of evil, lest, coming upon tyrannies and similar villainies, he do irremediable wrongs to others and suffer yet worse himself; but let him know how to choose the mean and avoid the extremes on either side, as far as possible, not only in this life but in all that which is to come. For this is the way of happiness.¹⁸⁸

As headmaster, Arnold made no illusions about his views concerning the purpose of education: school instruction should not be the mere recitation of facts or the assembly of technical knowledge, but a place where men could learn how to be active and virtuous citizens of an influential Empire.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, the prominence given to the study of Latin and Greek texts represented another key component of Arnoldian pedagogy. An essential element of Arnold's philosophy rested on his distinction between 'learning' and 'knowledge'. Throughout his career he differentiated between the mere comprehension of scientific or technical facts and what he referred to as 'true learning'. He maintained that referring to a person as "educated" simply because they possessed "scientific or physical knowledge," represented a misapplication of the term. Although this kind of learning was not, in and of itself, a bad thing vocationally, "in a political sense, and as a qualification for the exercise of political power," technical training alone proved fundamentally ineffective for achieving leadership and good governance.¹⁹⁰ According to

¹⁸⁸ Plato, *Republic*, Book X.

¹⁸⁹ Although primarily interested in the principles of 'education for leadership' at home in Britain, Arnold did occasionally provide insights into his views on British imperialism. For instance, in a letter sent to a companion from Rugby in April of 1842, Arnold stated flatly, "the Indian Empire, I believe...will have the opportunity...of doing great things for the welfare of Asia." For this see Stanley, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, 638.

¹⁹⁰ Stanley, ed. *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, 232.

Arnold, every man regardless of social class, occupation, or status had two fundamental roles in society, roles he dubbed “professional” and “liberal.”

Every man, from the highest to the lowest, has two businesses; the one of his own particular profession or calling, be it what it will, whether that of soldier, seaman, farmer, lawyer, mechanic, labourer [*sic*], etc.—the other his general calling, which he has in common with all his neighbours [*sic*], namely, the calling of a citizen and a man. The education which fits him for the first of these two businesses, is called professional; that which fits him for the second, is called liberal.¹⁹¹

Although each type of knowledge was important, Arnold concerned himself, above all, with the latter, “liberal,” classification. All men, he believed, were endowed with explicit responsibilities as citizens. He attested to his view that the evils of the day emanated from selfish pride, “from an idolatry of personal honor and dignity,” and from “personal independence in its modern and popular form.”¹⁹² In short, the cardinal sins of British society arose from one’s unwillingness to submit before the greater public good. It was precisely these fatal flaws Arnold hoped to eradicate from British society via the public school system. In order to eliminate vices of this kind, he argued that the paramouncy of public service needed to be stressed to men from an early age.

Under Arnold’s direction, Rugby gradually evolved as a place where young students could receive special training in this kind of “liberal” education. Arnold’s focus centered on the hope that the public school system might become a place where men of solid character were forged and where the vices of selfishness and conceit might vanish through focused training and mindful indoctrination.¹⁹³ He envisioned a new paradigm for public school education founded on

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 232.

¹⁹² Ibid. 356.

¹⁹³ This concept of purposeful indoctrination is a very apt description of the kind of the aims and methods employed, and is supported by such historians as J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic of Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1986), 69.

a philosophy of “education for leadership.”¹⁹⁴ Character and what Arnold dubbed “Christian morality” were much more important than even the most rudimentary fundamentals of reading, writing, arithmetic, or science. Arnold could not have expressed this sentiment any more concretely than he did in a letter to a companion in 1836. “Rather,” Arnold wrote

than have it [science] be the principal thing in my son’s mind, I would gladly have him think that the sun went round the earth, and that the stars were so many spangles set in the bright blue firmament. Surely the one thing needed for a Christian and an Englishman to study is a Christian and moral political philosophy...¹⁹⁵

Convictions of this kind were no mere banter, as students of the Arnoldian tradition were both openly aware and actively acknowledged the meaning of their education. For instance, while a student at Merchant Taylor’s from 1847 to 1855, John Beames committed thousands of lines of classical texts to memory. In adulthood he remembered with fondness, “we gentleman’s sons learnt Latin which was a proud distinction...I was encouraged in Latin, and my neglect of arithmetic was winked at.”¹⁹⁶ The same was generally true of other students, like James Stewart Smith, who entered Marlborough College during the height of the First World War. Of his education, Smith reported, “the main subjects taught in the Classical Fifth where I started were Greek, Latin, mathematics, and history, but at no time was I taught a word of science.”¹⁹⁷ Far more important to his instructors, Smith instead learnt by heart twenty lines a week of Ovid.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ McCulloch, *Philosophers and Kings*, 13-15.

¹⁹⁵ Letter of 9 May 1836, as quoted in T.W. Bamford, *Thomas Arnold* (London: The Cresset Press, 1960), 120.

¹⁹⁶ Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, 42. Beames’ use of the word ‘gentleman’ here is also quite telling. Although the term certainly has significant social connotations in the context of 19th century Britain, it is notable that Beames was a self-proclaimed “ordinary, average, middle class Englishman,” with no great family affiliations. The notion of being a gentleman had come to mean something quite different to him after his tenure in public school.

¹⁹⁷ RHO. Papers of James Stewart Smith. MSS. Afr. s. 1986. Unpublished Memoirs. “The Last Time: Autobiography of J.S. Smith, East Nigeria, 1924-1955,” family letters, and memoranda File 1. Box 1.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

There was an inherent and purposeful element of philistinism in this methodology. Just as Arnold intended school society to be universal and a microcosm of the outside world, so too did he intend his students' education to be as all encompassing as possible. The inherent morals extending out of the writings of the ancients, he believed, would do more to instill leadership than any other approach. In his assessment of the country's educational priorities, intellectual ability and raw knowledge always came last, behind "moral principles" and "gentlemanly conduct."¹⁹⁹ He summed up his feelings plainly when he wrote to a contemporary, "I do not so much care about scholarship." In another letter he also noted, "there is nothing more...despicable than an English gentleman destitute of all sense of his responsibilities...only reveling in the luxuries of our high civilization, and thinking himself a great person."²⁰⁰

Arnold berated the notion that memorization and cramming of cold facts could, in any way, bring about 'true learning.' In his estimation, students required to memorize and recite raw data were no better equipped than "parrots and slaves," unable to think or reason for themselves.²⁰¹ This kind of approach to education represented for Arnold everything that was wrong with the British educational system and, *ergo*, British society. As a remedy, he sought a completely different model wherein young boys, when they became men, could navigate the perils of everyday existence. At the core of Arnold's ideology rested a deep conviction that the life of every individual represented a constant battle between good and evil. His emphasis on Christian morality led him to believe that British society was pervaded by sin.²⁰² Every day, every moment of life brought with it a new decision, a new challenge. Young boys and grown

¹⁹⁹ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Charlottesville: The Modern Library, 1918), 206.

²⁰⁰ Thomas Arnold, as quoted in Christopher Stray, *Oxford Classics: Teaching and Learning, 1800-2000* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

²⁰¹ Letter of July 1831 to the Editor of the Sheffield Courant, regarding "The social condition of the operative classes" as quoted in Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, 173.

²⁰² Honey, *Tom Brown*, 3.

men alike faced innumerable choices every instant, which put their morality and their character in question. Arnold maintained that it was one's responses to such challenges that truly defined a man.²⁰³ One's outlook differentiated between the strong and the weak, the moral and the immoral, and the leaders and the followers. Yet, from a practical standpoint Arnold acknowledged the difficulties associated with preparing his pupils for every conceivable scenario. Thus, he sought out ways to make learning at Rugby as universal as humanly possible in the sense that he aimed to ensure that his students were capable of dealing with any challenge that came their way in a morally respectable way. Arnold purposefully endeavored to reform public school education in Britain in hopes of cementing an institution, which would instruct young boys how to identify the correct moral response to any problem that might confront them.²⁰⁴ Furnished with such skills, Arnold hoped his pupils would enter into the adult world service-minded, gentlemanly, well rounded, and armed with the qualities of capable citizens and governors.

²⁰³ Letter to the Editor of the Sheffield Courant, July 1831.

²⁰⁴ Heffer, *High Minds*, 9.

The Arnoldian Legacy:

Arnold's role in implanting notions of 'education for leadership' into the British public school system is unquestionable. For evidence of this fact, one has to look no farther than the principles and methods of other British headmasters and pedagogues that followed him. In the century after Arnold's ascension as headmaster at Rugby, virtually every aspect of the British public school system was re-shaped to fit into the basic Arnoldian mold. An excellent example of this legacy can be witnessed in the career of Edward Thring, headmaster of Uppingham from 1883 to 1888. Thring committed his life to the employment of 'education for leadership', and his seminal work, *The Theory and Practice of Teaching*, which ran through an astounding sixteen editions between 1883 and 1910, left its own lasting mark on the Victorian tradition of education. Although only serving a short time at Uppingham, Thring implanted himself as a foremost intellectual and educationalist of the late Victorian Era.²⁰⁵ He, like Arnold, believed the just application of power to be something that could be taught, instilled, and engrained into the minds of men. In short, he too felt training in the art of governance and administration to be one of the ultimate aims of public school education. In his work, *Education and School*, published in 1867, Thring wrote:

One of the advantages of school is, that a boy finds himself there in a world of law, and order, and constitutional rights and penalties, whilst still surrounded by friendly and loving influences; instead of under a despotic will, as at home, however sweetened by love, and indeed identical with it. He will have in after life to live by law, it is good he should learn to do so early, and not expect to find everything free from discipline, or hardship even. How much bitterness would be saved if the vagaries of undisciplined natures, which few neighborhoods are without, had been checked in boyhood, when law could be applied to such childish ebullitions. Spoilt children of mature years are like grit in the wheels, both in society and in public life.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Barnett, *Collapse of British Power*, 29.

²⁰⁶ Edward Thring, *Education and School* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1867), 253.

From this, it is clear that Thring inherited Arnold's own views of the public school system as microcosm of adult life in its structure, natural hierarchy, and administration, while also emphasizing it as a place of training, not of needless brutality.

Along the same lines, Thring also voiced his commitment to ensuring Britain would succeed in the execution of power where other great civilizations of the past had failed. In 1867, Thring assumed an interesting outlook on history, arguing:

Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and multitudes of minor potentates, worked, were civilized, gathered in knowledge, and, with knowledge, power; then power brought temptation, and the opportunity of gratifying lust, and even whilst they triumphed they fell. Each in turn rising like giants in bodily and intellectual strength, falling like drunken giants, as each drunkard blindly struck out in riotous insolence, wounding alike friend and foe, and insulting all. History hitherto is only the record of drunken sons of knowledge pulling down on their own heads the palace they have raised.²⁰⁷

In this statement, one can practically hear the voice of Ralph Furse uttering his maxim that men of brains should be slaves to men of character. For Thring, British public schools were the first line of defense against the follies of the past. He described the near decade a boy spent in public school as, "the mighty ten years that change the world."²⁰⁸ If Britain's own empire was not to fall victim to the same fate as other ancient powers, he surmised, British boys needed to learn the lessons of failed civilizations and remain guarded against the temptations of power. Like Arnold, Thring adopted the notion that mankind was inherently sinful and, therefore, not naturally suited to just government.²⁰⁹ Yet, Thring believed that it was possible to restore man's fallen nature. This, he proclaimed, was the purpose of "True Education."²¹⁰ The acquisition of such training, for Thring, was Britain's key to ensuring that it did not become yet another one of history's "drunken giants."

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 13.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 42-3.

²⁰⁹ Thring, *The Theory and Practice of Teaching*, 19.

²¹⁰ Thring, *Education and School*, 21-22.

Thring also lauded the works of the ancients and praised Socrates as a teacher who, “sent a plough into the hearts of men, and broke up the ground,” while also serving as a model educator who, at once, “taught nothing,” and at the same time, “produced disciples who learnt everything.”²¹¹ Thring championed the prefect system as a means by which a school could become “a little world of training” whereby “good and evil were in their proper positions...good being encouraged and predominant, [and] evil discouraged and being conquered.”²¹² For Thring, the public school system of the student government

...so far from being bullying, is a law that protects the weak from the strong by the only means that can effectually do so, namely, by destroying brute force, and reducing it to insignificance in the school government, and lodging a power, which must exist somewhere, in the hands of a few, and those the best qualified by position and intellect to wield it well.²¹³

Yet another inheritor of this system also quick to recognize the preeminence of the Arnoldian legacy was G.E.L Cotton, headmaster of Marlborough College from 1852 to 1858. Cotton, himself an alumnus of Arnold’s Rugby, brought with him to Marlborough the reforms initiated at his *alma mater*. In particular, Cotton heeded Arnold’s warning about the danger of students of exclusively intellectual genius. In his own estimation, the brilliant were often “unsettled, dissatisfied, self-conscious, vain, and morbid.”²¹⁴ Furthermore, James Welldon, headmaster of Harrow School from 1885 to 1898, proved himself a disciple of Arnold’s when he wrote:

An English Headmaster, as he looks to the future of his pupils, will not forget that they are destined to be the citizens of the greatest empire under heaven; he will teach them patriotism not only by his words but by his example...He will inspire them with faith in the divinely ordered mission of their country...[and] he will impress upon their young

²¹¹ Thring, *Theory and Practice of Teaching*, 125-6.

²¹² Thring, *Education and School*, 234.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 266-67.

²¹⁴ J.A. Mangan, “Athleticism: A Case Study of the Evolution of an Educational Ideology” in Simon and Bradley, *The Victorian Public School*, 158.

minds the convictions that the great principles upon which the happiness of England rests—the principles of truth, liberty, equality, and religion...he will emphasize the fact, that no principles however splendid, can greatly or permanently affect mankind, unless they are illustrated by bright personal examples of morality.²¹⁵

Later, Welldon's successor, Sir Cyril Norwood, a man who devoted the better part of forty-five years of his life to the British public school system and served in just about every possible capacity, also credited Arnold's reforms as an influence to his approach toward education. As classics master at Leeds Grammar School from 1901 to 1906, headmaster of Bristol Grammar School from 1906 to 1916, Master of Marlborough College from 1917 to 1925, and Headmaster of Harrow from 1926 to 1934, Norwood was thoroughly aware of Arnold's influence on his own career and methods of teaching. Moreover, he intentionally challenged those who questioned Arnold's impact on the public school system, arguing plainly that any "examination of the state of the other great schools at the period when Arnold began to be Headmaster of Rugby will show that not one of his reforms was being attempted, and nothing of his spirit was being shown." Yet, look "a little later", he argued, and one can find that "his methods were being tried everywhere."²¹⁶ Case and point, for Norwood, was his own predecessor at Harrow, Charles Vaughn. Norwood credited Vaughn, a former student at Arnold's Rugby, for fundamentally changing the direction and impetus of school administration at Harrow and basing them upon Arnoldian principles.²¹⁷ Even Haileybury, founded as a training college for administrators in the East India Company in 1808 was re-modeled along Arnoldian lines in 1862.²¹⁸ Beyond headmasters of the institutions, themselves, Arnold's contributions have even proven noteworthy at official levels. Published in 1944, the Fleming Report, one of the most sweeping assessments

²¹⁵ E.C. Welldon, *Schoolmasters*, 284 as quoted in Wilkinson, *Prefects*, 101-2.

²¹⁶ Norwood, *The English Tradition of Education*, 16.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 48.

of the state of the British Educational system in the country's history, noted that the "fame of Arnold led to the other Public Schools accepting his principles," cementing them into their own institutions.²¹⁹

Furthermore, in their own way, men like Thring, Welldon, Norwood, and many others built upon the basic tenets of the Arnoldian tradition. Notably, Thring emphasized the brotherhood of public school men, which he hoped would endure well beyond school years. To the Arnoldian tradition, he added an emphasis on school spirit that he believed might empower boys to "feel that they are part of a great living organism of life..."²²⁰ Thring meant the school experience to be one that might give boys an early sense of what it meant to be loyal, accountable, and dependable. In turn, he trusted that early sense of fidelity would carry over into adult life. Loyalty to one's House or sports team, he expected, would transfer naturally in adulthood to a sense of loyalty to one's regiment, political party, corporation, or particular branch of public service.²²¹ Such was the purpose of the innumerable school songs forged at Uppingham and other public schools across Great Britain. These chants emphasized both the public school ethos and the sense of community Thring and others hoped to inspire. As one song written by Thring blazoned:

*... Our champions stand,
In many a land
They'll prove old England's fame,
In fight, each son,
Or lost, or won,
Bears high his father's name*

*Merry England, merry England,
Let foes say what they will,
For gentle and brave,*

²¹⁹ Fleming Report, 19.

²²⁰ Wilkinson, *The Prefects*, 43; Also see, Thring, *The Theory and Practice of Teaching*, 257-8.

²²¹ Ibid, 46.

*On field and wave,
We will uphold thee still*²²²

Britain's Victorian pedagogues meant these romantic sentiments of unity and oneness to achieve much more than just the promotion of team or house spirit. Educators meant the public school to give a boy, when he became a man, a sense that he belonged to a great community of which he would forever be apart. Wherever fate took a man—whether into the Holy Orders, the military, the far reaches of Empire, or even the hustle and bustle of Fleet Street—Victorian educators intended the public school experience to inculcate a sense of oneness. The result was, as one historian put it, “if you placed them all [public school alumni] at a dinner table, they would not feel altogether strangers to one another.”²²³ The experiences that they shared in their upbringing and education created an environment wherein Britain's future administrators, whether serving at home or abroad, were likely to have had many of the same school masters, inherited the same values, made many of the same acquaintances, and even found humor in the same jokes. Together, they recited and embraced the lessons of anthems like “The Death of Nelson,” “Rule Britannia,” “Drakes Drum,” and “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” Singing the same songs, attending the same lectures, reciting the same prose, these were no mere rituals; instead, they were purposeful incantations meant to ensure the survival of the public school ethos beyond adolescence.

No other activity fostered this sense of spirit quite like athletic competition and team games. While there is some debate about the origins of the ‘cult of sport’ in British public school education, it is clear that athletics served as one of the most important additions to the

²²² Edward Thring, *Uppingham School Songs and Borth Lyrics* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1888), 24-5.

²²³ James Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of Empire* (New York: Mariner Publishing, 1980), 187.

Arnoldian system of the late nineteenth-century.²²⁴ Athletic competition served as more than just a way for boys to expend physical energy and promote healthy living—by the 1860s, schoolmasters also came to see it as an educational tool.²²⁵ If the prefect system and classical education were meant to inculcate boys with fundamental skills of leadership, self-restraint, and a sense of morality, the playing field was intended to instill values of sportsmanship, team spirit, and fair play. As historian Corelli Barnett commented, “the purpose of...ball games was a debased version of Arnold’s idea of Christian moral education—it was to develop ‘character,’” and numerous educators of the Arnoldian creed believed sports to be peculiarly suited toward that end.²²⁶ Thus, schoolmasters encouraged their students to participate and compete in team games, like cricket, rowing, football, polo, rugby, and even boxing. There was a saying at Harrow that a boy might spend fifteen hours a week playing cricket or, if he took “every opportunity,” twenty hours.²²⁷ Cyril Norwood described cricket as a “game of surprises” and unanticipated “dramatic developments” that at particular moments “may require considerable courage,” and at others inspired “fairness and chivalry to the common stock of our national ideas.”²²⁸ Of rugby matches, Norwood wrote:

²²⁴ Patrick F. McDevitt’s, *May the Best Man Win: Sport, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), argues that the importance of the games ethic originated with the reforms of Hely Hutchinson Almond, headmaster of Lretto School in the 1860s, who based the curriculum his Edinburgh school on physical education. Other scholarly works, such as J.A. Mangan’s, *The Games Ethic of Imperialism: The Games Ethic of Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1986), also supports Almond as being a major contributor to this ideal. On the other hand, J.R. de Honey’s, *Tom Brown’s Universe*, argues that G.E.L Cotton, headmaster of Marlborough College from 1852 to 1858, should be credited with the promotion of athleticism and team games in the public school system.

²²⁵ Norwood, *English Tradition of Education*, 101.

²²⁶ Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, 35.

²²⁷ William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory, 1874-1932* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984), 168.

²²⁸ Norwood, *English Tradition of Education*, 103.

Everybody must be prepared to take hard knocks in perfectly good temper, and no game requires more courage than this, the courage, for instance, of hurling yourself fearlessly on the ball when it is at the feet of a rush of opposing forwards. When it becomes 'rough' or unfair the game is ruined: it is one of its many merits that it can only be played by those who are in the only real sense of the word gentlemen. It is a test of character.

Most school officials utterly rejected professional athletics as a kind of gladiatorial exhibition. At public school, victory was not even half the point. Norwood went on to write that it would be "a thousand pities" if Britons forgot that one must "count the game, and not the prize."²²⁹ The ethic of athletic competition was to be found in the sacrifice, not the victory. As Norwood explains, hurling oneself into certain danger and the threat of injury served as undeniable proof of one's commitment to the team, and confirmation that he might be relied upon by his peers.

Furthermore, public school officials also viewed sports as a way to make men out of boys.²³⁰ According to historian Patrick McDevitt, many Britons perceived sport as a means "to construct, propagate, and maintain national conceptions of manhood."²³¹ Many British intellectuals held that morality and self-restraint would be of only limited usefulness without the courage, bravery, and assertiveness needed to actively make use of those qualities.

Schoolmasters and government officials alike believed this to be especially true of service in the Empire.²³² Cecil Earle Tyndale-Biscoe, head of the Church Missionary School in Kashmir, from 1890 to 1947, defined the Arnoldian ideal of the 'Christian Gentleman' and its connection to manliness when he wrote:

Christianity is a life that has to be lived. Christ Jesus was a perfect man as well as God, and to be a Christian one has to strive after perfect manliness—strength of body, strength of intellect, strength of soul—and to show that strength by practical sympathy for the weak. It is only those who are true men who can appreciate the Ideal Man. Someone has to create desire for the ideal, and this cannot be done by talk, but by putting before the

²²⁹ Ibid, 107.

²³⁰ McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win*, 3.

²³¹ Ibid, 2-3.

²³² Mangan, *The Games Ethic of Imperialism*, 18.

boys our great example, Christ Jesus, and asking them to join us in trying to follow that life, the life of service.²³³

The cricket or football pitch represented another medium wherein lessons of morality and virtue could be taught, but it also served as a place whereby schoolboys could learn *inter alia* how to harness these qualities and put them into practice.²³⁴ The playing field was also the closest replica schools had to the imperial battlefield.²³⁵ The editors of *The Marlburian*, the official publication of Marlborough College, for example, frequently referred to athletes as “combatants” and likened matches to ceremonious “battles.”²³⁶ The emphasis on games and competition taught that one may get hurt, but that men who play the game should neither fear injury, nor mind it.²³⁷ These ideas were a direct response to the worries held by some that an over-emphasis on forging the ‘Christian gentleman’ could have an emasculating effect.²³⁸ Thus, competition and team games emerged as a tool for the public school to inculcate ideas of masculinity along with character and virtue, unifying both physical and moral courage.²³⁹ Edward Thring clearly identified with the attitude that manliness and moral virtue were not mutually exclusive:

It is the separation of the parts of life that makes the difference, the cutting life in two halves, as if a boy’s choice lay between manly games *or* learning; when the choice really is, take both, like bread and wine; for if bread strengthens man’s heart, the oil and wine of games make him a cheerful countenance. Life is not all bread, and each helps the other. There is no lack of ability in boys, generally, it is character that is wanted to ensure success; but character may be helped.²⁴⁰

²³³ Cecil Earle Tyndale-Biscoe as quoted in John Macaloon (ed.), *Muscular Christianity and the Colonial and Post-Colonial World* (London: Routledge, 2013).

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ J.A. Mangan, “Athleticism: A Case Study of the Evolution of an Educational Ideology” in Simon and Bradley, *The Victorian Public School*, 157.

²³⁶ *The Marlburian*. February 13, 1884 Vol. XIX. No. 303, 9-10.

²³⁷ Norwood, *English tradition of Education*, 107.

²³⁸ C.H. Spurgeon, *A Good Start: A Book for Young Men and Women* (1898); Thomas Hughes, *The Manliness of Christ* as quoted in Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit*, 72-3.

²³⁹ Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit*, 8.

²⁴⁰ Thring, *Education and School*, 34.

It is here that one can see the public school emphasis on training the ‘whole’ man: the promotion of both bodily fitness *and* gentlemanly virtue. Boys were brought up in the tradition that a healthy body was just as important as a healthy mind.²⁴¹

²⁴¹ Maurice Zinkin (ed.), “The Indian Civil Service: Survivors Remember the Raj” *Indo-British Review: A Journal of History*, Vol. XXII (No. 1-2), Parts I & 2, especially Philip Mason’s, “Setting the Scene”, 7-11.

The ‘Oxbridge’ Ethos:

Beyond the public schools themselves these same qualities and principles were most often carried over and encouraged in Britain’s elite universities—namely, Oxford, Cambridge and, to a slightly lesser degree, other prestigious institutions like Sandhurst and Woolwich.²⁴² Although their methods sometimes differed, the aims of each of these educational establishments were practically identical.²⁴³ The British university system at these types of institutions was entirely defined by the post-Waterloo ideal of power as a moral principle. The stated goal of these institutions, according to Dr. Edward Pusey, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, was to “make not books, but men,” and almost every aspect of school life “emphasized masculine strengths, manly virtues, and an active life in world affairs.”²⁴⁴ Such a sentiment perfectly encapsulates the ethos of these prestigious colleges and illustrates their connection to the public school ideology of the day. In short, for contemporaries, university life at Oxford and Cambridge emphasized equally both learning *and* gentlemanly conduct. In the words of an Oxford fellow and professor at Wadham College, A.M.M. Stedman:

The ideal object of an Oxford career is to imbue the student with the highest form of culture, to teach him the best that has been thought and written by the best minds on the highest subjects, and to enable him to play the best part in the great struggle of human life. A special and professional training should be only a secondary object of such a career...it [the university] aims at producing noble tendencies rather than commercial results, and humanizing the man rather than turning out the professional expert.²⁴⁵

²⁴² RHO. “Heussler Papers” Mss.Brit.EMP.s.480. Box 2: File 6, Folio 16: Letter to Heussler from W.R. Crocker, 16 August, 1960.

²⁴³ Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 108.

²⁴⁴ Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 11.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

University dons meant a student's college career to be a natural complement to a public school education, wherein one might develop valuable friendships, strengthen their moral nature, and become true men.²⁴⁶

The most influential figure at Oxford in this age of educational transformation was Thomas Hill Green, Oxford fellow at Balliol College from 1860 to 1882 and Professor of Moral Philosophy. Green argued for the necessity of public service and a subordination of one's selfish ambition to what Green saw as being the 'common good'.²⁴⁷ In order to truly become service-minded, Green argued, one had to be conscientious of the needs of others. Green argued that a man could only achieve the highest stage of his development when he was "able to think of the perfect life as essentially conditioned by the exercise of virtues, resting on a self-sacrificing will..."²⁴⁸ A core aspect of Green's pedagogy emphasized the development of 'gentlemanly values', which Green defined as a union of qualities ranging from reasoned judgment, to a genuine concern for others.²⁴⁹ At Balliol, Green exhibited a tremendous amount of influence on his students and, clearly, his devotion to instilling a sense of duty spilled over into the lives of his pupils, as over 90% of all Balliol undergraduates dedicated their lives to public service in the seventy-five years leading up to 1914.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 85.

²⁴⁷ Peter P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists: Selected Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 54; L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of British Africa, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 200.

²⁴⁸ T.H. Green as quoted in Nicholson, *Political Philosophy*, 59.

²⁴⁹ David Brink Plant, *Perfectionism and the Common Good: Themes in the Philosophy of T.H. Green* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5. T.H. Green", 32.

²⁵⁰ Raymond Plant, "T.H. Green: citizenship, education, and the law" in Harry Judge ed., *The University and Public Education: the Contribution of Oxford* (London: Routledge, 2013), 20-1. For Green's influence in general, see Chapter 2 in its entirety. An earlier, yet still important assessment of Green's influence at Balliol and Oxford in general, see Abby Porter Leland, *The Educational Theory and Practice of T.H. Green* (Columbia: Teachers College), 1911. While it can't be said that this statistic is entirely indicative of only Green's influence, it certainly stands

Furthermore, through a devoted focus on the classics Oxford and Cambridge maintained the emphasis on philistinism and universal learning that boys had grown accustomed to in their boarding school days. As in the public schools, instructors purposefully subjugated technical and scientific knowledge to a study of ancient texts and history. In a clear indication of the times, classicists and historians at Oxford commonly discredited those outside of the humanities—a professor of engineering, for instance—as “Professors of Jam-Making.”²⁵¹ One engineering professor at Oxford at the turn of the century stated sharply, “if I had the inclination to punish a scientific man...I would appoint him to an Oxford professorship.”²⁵² Additionally, contemporaries described scientists as being the “least imaginative of all people,” who would prove of no benefit to the administration of society.²⁵³ Oxbridge dons likewise adopted the same skepticism for narrow intellectual abilities and scholarship as public school headmasters. University education centered too on creating the ‘whole’ man, who was well-rounded—an expert of nothing, but capable of anything. Thus, the aim of higher education was not to produce scholars—being a scholar did not necessarily make one educated; instead, the preeminent educationalists at Oxford during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century defined education as everything that “is left when [a student] has forgotten all you learn at school.”²⁵⁴ Even here at the university level, it was not until the end of the first decade of the twentieth-century that ‘technical’ or scientific training gained momentum and respect in the British

as a shocking indication of the kinds of lessons being taught at Oxford and the impact that Balliol had on forging future leaders in both Britain and the Empire.

²⁵¹ Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire*, 5.

²⁵² As quoted in Janet Howarth, “Science Education in Late-Victorian Oxford: A Curious Case of Failure?” in *The English Historical Review* Vol. 102, No. 403 (April, 1987), 335.

²⁵³ RHO. Heussler Papers. H. Grose-Hodge, “Ends and Means of a Public School Education,” talk given before Bedford School Mother's Guild, 22 June, 1960.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

educational system.²⁵⁵ For most Oxbridge fellows, science proved incompatible with the development of morality and character, which they deemed to be the ultimate purpose of their students' education. According to Barnett, "Oxford's function was 'humanizing the man rather than turning out the professional expert,'" and practically everything in a student's day revolved around that end.²⁵⁶

Beyond just the classics, these prominent universities broadly emphasized a liberal arts education with a special emphasis on the study of history. Oxbridge educators believed it was their job to prepare the next generation of leaders; therefore, they deemed it was crucial for their students to learn the ethical, moral, and political laws that could be drawn from history. In particular, English Constitutional History represented the cornerstone of university education.²⁵⁷ Success, as in the public school setting, depended upon the character of the student, not necessarily his or her ability to engage in the methods of their discipline. Historian Reba Soffer contends that, "history more than any other liberal arts subject, made it reputable to indulge an antiquarian passion, a romantic yearning for a comprehensible, valiant, and decisive past."²⁵⁸ British history, then, was taught in such a way as to encourage pupils to view their history as a struggle between the moral and the immoral. In particular, university educators explained Britain's history before 1689 as a conscious struggle toward constitutional liberty. After 1689, Oxbridge professors taught British history as the expansion of British liberty and its deliverance to other civilizations. When applied to the Indian Empire, for instance, Soffer explains that contemporary "historians did not justify the Indian empire in terms of the advantages,

²⁵⁵ Barnett, *Decline of British Power*, 40. As Barnett correctly asserts, by this time it was too late for the generation of senior administrators who came to power during and before the 1920s and 1930s—the height of British imperialism—to feel the effects of this change.

²⁵⁶ Barnett, *Decline of British Power*, 36-40.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁵⁸ Soffer, 37.

commercial, military, or any other kind, which India could bring England, but solely for the good England could confer on India.”²⁵⁹

Not only could history serve as a reminder of the ways that British liberty had developed in its own right, but also many Oxford dons viewed these approaches to history as a means of instilling confidence into their students. According to Soffer, “history gave the governing community confidence in itself. History appeared to document the elasticity of British society’s ability to accommodate change while maintaining its character and institutions.”²⁶⁰ Again, in the same spirit as with the public schools, Oxford and Cambridge also placed great emphasis on sport and athleticism as a way of preparing a man for their adult life. It was a common maxim at Oxford, for instance, that “rowing and reading” were synonymous with the Greek idea of “music and gymnastics.”²⁶¹ Those who revered rowing at Oxford viewed it as being not only exceptional physical exercise, but also a “valuable means of social intercourse.”²⁶² The chief aim of university life, then, was to combine intellectual and physical superiority

Like the public schools of the Arnoldian tradition Oxbridge provided an overarching educational environment that, according to Soffer, created “durable patterns of behavior and permanent habits of thought.”²⁶³ Within these prominent universities, curriculum was rooted in the idea of an evolving nation, which used its power to create a greater moral good.²⁶⁴ As Soffer has demonstrated, “English education at Oxford and Cambridge mirrored a broader national confidence in coherent intellectual and moral values in their patriotic senses.”²⁶⁵

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 96.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Stedman, 117.

²⁶² Ibid, 91.

²⁶³ Soffer, 11,

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 14.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 11.

The Fruits of the System:

As remarkable as the changes in the structure of British education were during the Victorian Era, they would have meant absolutely nothing had the above-mentioned reforms not achieved their desired effect. Within the writings and the reminiscences of former prefects, monitors, and public school boys, particularly those who later became public servants, there is ample evidence to suggest that the public school and university systems, more often than not, bore their intended fruit. Although clearly not universal—no one would claim that the Arnoldian system achieved its desired aims in the lives of every student that passed through the halls of a great school—the consequences of this era of reform are remarkably evident as the service-minded nature of the public school system “planted the seeds of imperial fervor” in whole generations of young pupils.²⁶⁶

A particularly telling example of this kind of change is demonstrated by the early life and experiences of James Stewart Smith, who is quite representative of the prototypical public official of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Smith’s educational career began in 1910 at Malvern Link, a preparatory school centered in Worcestershire, approximately forty miles southwest of Birmingham. From there he enrolled in public school and Marlborough College, before gaining entrance into King’s College, Cambridge and, finally, on to a career in the Colonial Civil Service. Born in August of 1900, Smith joined a family with a long history and tradition of dutiful submission to the British state. Smith’s father, one of five sons to

²⁶⁶ Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, 125.

dedicate his life to public service, became the then youngest serving Consul-General in the Colonial Service, at 41 years of age.²⁶⁷

Following in the footsteps of his father and uncles, when James Stewart was only ten years old, he was sent to Malvern Link Preparatory School, where he earned his colors in cricket and football and was named captain of the school by the time he was thirteen. While Smith had no clearly defined powers as captain at Malvern Link, he was expected to be an example for the other—particularly the younger—boys to follow. As Captain, he soon recognized his most important duty was “to be something of a leader, and generally to be on the side of authority.”²⁶⁸ Assuming this responsibility, Smith’s chief mission was to curb the blatant and excessive bullying of weaker and younger students. The administration of the Link, as it was commonly known, meant Smith was to be the champion of the ostracized and unpopular. In his position of authority his headmaster encouraged him to come to the defense of the bullied and the outcasts, to encourage and inspire the idle, and discipline the bullies. Initially, Smith was extremely uncomfortable with such a role. He was hesitant to intervene in cases brought before him, as he had no experience in the exercise of authority or confidence in his own abilities, and he feared the ridicule and embarrassment that accompanied his position of prominence and power. In such an unfamiliar and, no doubt, uncomfortable position, Smith struggled with his own insecurities and how to assert himself in front of his peers. Early on, he admitted, it was his natural inclination to shirk his duties and embrace “the easy life,” avoiding confrontation altogether.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ RHO. Papers of James Stewart Smith. MSS. Afr. s. 1986. Unpublished Memoirs. “The Last Time: Autobiography of J.S. Smith, East Nigeria, 1924-1955,” family letters, and memoranda File 1. Box 1.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 32-33.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

Yet, through the urging of his headmaster, with whom he worked closely, Smith came to accept his lot in life at the cost of great personal discomfort. Enduring what he later referred to as the most challenging, and perhaps, unhappiest period of his life, Smith repeatedly confronted the school bully, despite himself facing extreme unpopularity and persecution. The stress Smith endured was so intense that his younger brother, Henry, wrote to their father at the beginning of their second semester, “I am afraid Jim will not have a very nice term. He told me yesterday that he had a 'perfectly miserable' last term. At one time he was ragged (about 2 days) and he had to keep order and he had great trouble...”²⁷⁰ Although the drudges of leadership and all that it entailed placed Smith under great emotional and mental strain, his experiences were not without consequence. Ten days before his second and final semester as captain ended, Smith wrote his father

Hurrah! There is hardly any more of the term left now; I am looking forward to the holidays most frightfully; in fact much more than usual, as then I will have finished with my captainship, which I have never much enjoyed. Not till next holidays will I tell you of any of my difficulties which I have had during the past two terms. I have determined if possible to stick it out to the end without telling anyone specially, except Henry...Anyhow there is one consolation, and that is that God knows I have tried to do my duty as much as possible—to stop anything like bullying, and to do my best to cheer up people when in trouble, or [intervene] when chaps are having a 'rebellion'.²⁷¹

These are compelling words from a boy barely in his teens. Evaluating Smith’s recollections of his time as captain, it is clear that he underwent a dramatic and noteworthy transformation in his character and his outlook on life and school at this very young age. In spite of his sufferings, Smith’s experiences as captain clearly left an impression that was deep and resounding—leadership and duty, never minding the discomfort and trials they may bring, were the most

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 35.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 37.

important attributes in a man's life. For Smith, such considerations developed into being as much a part of his day his day as homework, football, mealtime, or nightly prayers.

Equally important in Smith's story were the apparent dividends he reaped from his commitment to his duty—these were at least equally as important in framing his mindset. At the end of his captaincy, Smith learned that he had been accepted into Marlborough College, which—Marlborough being one of the nine 'great schools'—equated to winning an indescribably prestigious honor meant only for the best of the best. For Smith, such news served as vindication for all the hardship he endured, and seemingly proved the worth in all his suffering. After learning of his acceptance, Smith described his return to the Link the next term as “triumphant.”²⁷² When word got out around the school of Smith's accomplishment, his classmates, teachers, and family greeted him as a hero. Smith remembered a personal audience with the headmaster who lauded praise on his achievements; his peers greeted him with congratulations at every turn; and in the succeeding days he received numerous letters of praise from family and friends.²⁷³ The results of Smith's experiences are clear. In spite of the initial stresses, discomfort, and fear Smith entered Marlborough College with an entirely different outlook than in his first term as Captain at Malvern Link. Clearly, Smith's experiences showed him how the benefits of doing one's duty outweighed the challenges of authority. By the end of his career at Marlborough, Smith assumed the position of school prefect, again testing his hand as an administrator.

Crucially, this system of school administration taught similar lessons to generations of adolescent boys who navigated, in their own ways, the peaks and valleys of boarding school existence. While only in their teenage years, prefects and school monitors learned to feel the tug

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

of the reigns of power.²⁷⁴ In the words of Kenneth Bradley, a former prefect and product of the Arnoldian tradition

[As a prefect] I learned to exercise some responsibility and authority, which is the virtue of the system... Without ever hearing a word said about them, we were educated to accept leadership as a duty and a privilege and as our lot in life.²⁷⁵

Striking almost the exact same tune, John Rutherford Postlethwaite, Colonial Civil Servant and product of the public school environment, recalled of his five years of public school that he learned “a certain amount of what is generally called education...the art of living with one’s fellow men and taking orders and, later on, of giving orders.”²⁷⁶ In his memoirs Postlethwaite expanded on these sentiments, stating

I read somewhere that there is nothing more awful than a natural ass who has been well educated. I agree most emphatically, and I hope I may not live to see the day when entrance into the [Colonial] Service to which I had the honor to belong is dependent on the competitive examination alone...Our African child races want leaders, men who know how to govern and command respect as well as affection...and the candidate [for the C.S.], will, I hope, be able to produce letters from his public school to show that, as a prefect or monitor, he was able to rule in the little world of school, as he will be expected to rule in some far-away African district.²⁷⁷

The Fleming Report of 1944 echoed these sentiments, noting Arnold’s undeniable contribution to the implementation of this new method of instruction. The committee responsible for compiling the report wrote that, thanks to Arnold’s system, boys were given a sense of purpose in life, and the “prefect system gave them experience in the art of authority.”²⁷⁸ Over and over again, these sentiments are repeated in the writings and recollections of public servants, imperial administrators and, in particular, district officers. Additionally, these legacies had impressive

²⁷⁴ Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 15.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 21.

²⁷⁶ John Rutherford Parkin Postlethwaite, *I Look Back* (London: T.V. Boardman and Company, Ltd, 1947), 12.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 147.

²⁷⁸ *Fleming Report*, 19.

staying power, surviving well into the twilight years of Empire. R.J.S. Thomson, a member of the Sudan Political Service from 1943 to 1955, said of his education

My schooling was an excellent preparation for my career in the Sudan Political Service. From an early age one was taught to be self-reliant and to accept responsibility. The virtues of self-discipline and physical fitness, both essential elements in public school training, were to prove of estimable value as also was the experience of exercising command which one gains from being a house and subsequently a school monitor.²⁷⁹

Even Robert Graves, someone who had many unkind memories of his public school days remembered that his “serious training as a gentleman began” at public and preparatory school.²⁸⁰

Another crucial aspect of the public school legacy that must be considered is the unifying effect that the common educational experience had on the creation of an *esprit de corps* among alumni of such institutions. After more than half a century of indoctrination whole generations of men entered the public services who had endured the trials of the prefectorial system, could recite by heart nearly all of Horace and Virgil, and who had waged war with one another on the cricket field. The famous novelist and alumnus of Harrow and Oxford, Anthony Trollope, acknowledged this distinct, if unspoken, connection in a piece he contributed to *The Fortnightly Review* in 1865

We [public school men] remember chiefly, if not only, all the things that the schools have done for us. Whilst there we made our friendships. There we learned to be honest, true and brave. There we were trained to discard the softness of luxury and, to love the hardihood and dangers of violent exercise. There we became men; and we became men after such a fashion that we are feared or loved, as may be, but always respected—even though it be in spite of our ignorance. Who can define the nobility that has attached itself to Englishmen as the result of their public schools; or can say whence it comes or what it consists?²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Letter to J.A. Mangan from R.J.S. Thomson (Sudan Political Service 1943-55) as quoted in J.A. Mangan, “The Education of an Elite Imperial Administration: The Sudan Political Service and the British Public School System,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15 (4) (1982), 671-99.

²⁸⁰ Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), 18.

²⁸¹ Anthony Trollope, “Public Schools” *The Fortnightly Review*. Volume 2. (1865), 479-80.

While many, like Trollope, could not easily identify it, most of those who emerged from the public schools tacitly and, at the very least, subconsciously understood the meaning of their education. It not only served as a common bond that unified alumni, but it also greatly informed how they approached their world once they reached adulthood. Their identity, forged at such a young age, endured. Arnold, Thring, Norwood, and other educators of their day took pains to acknowledge and ensure the lasting effects of their pupil's training. They believed that the nature of their educational system prohibited students from ever truly being able to rid themselves of their tutelage. Arnold, for instance, wrote

When it is said, that men in manhood so often throw their Greek and Latin aside, and that this very fact shows the uselessness of their early studies... it by no means shows that system to be useless, unless it followed that when a man laid aside his Greek and Latin books, he forgot also all that he had ever gained from them. This, however, is so far from being the case, that even where the results of a classical education are least tangible, and least appreciated even by the individual himself, still the mind often retains much of the effect of its early studies in the general liberality of its tastes and comparative comprehensiveness of its views and notions.²⁸²

Likewise, Thring also emphasized the lasting impression left by public school training:

The idlest, most ill-taught schoolboy has [the public school ethos] within him, which he knows not of... Even those who revile it knows [*sic*] it exists, and stand one inch higher by despising it even. That vast empire of glorious life in which all the greatness of the past lives and moves, is a realm consecrated to Power.²⁸³

For proof of the effectiveness of their system, one has to look no further than the careers, writings, and recollections of former schoolboys, themselves.

One of the most apparent indicators of the remnants of the public school and Oxbridge ethos into adulthood were the sheer number of men of this pedigree who chose to join the public services. As Figure 1.1 demonstrates, from 1873 to 1913 history honors graduates from Oxford and Cambridge entered more public service positions after graduation than any other

²⁸² Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, 348-352.

²⁸³ Thring, *The Theory and Practice of Teaching*, 38-9.

profession.²⁸⁴ Over 90% of all Balliol undergraduates dedicated their lives to public service in the seventy-five years leading up to 1914.²⁸⁵ The numbers are even more striking when applying the percentages of colonial civil servants who received an Oxbridge education. For the three-year period leading up to the First World War, ranging from 1912 to 1914, two-thirds of all those who entered the Colonial Civil Services graduated from a University and, of those, sixty-two percent were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge.²⁸⁶ From 1899 to 1952, the Sudan Political Service employed more administrators from Oxford and Cambridge than any other institution, by far. Even more significantly, of the 153 Oxford graduates to join the Sudan Service in this fifty-three year time span, 99 earned a degree in either the Classics or History.²⁸⁷ The numbers are extremely similar when adding Cambridge to the mix. Out of 50 total Cambridge alums to join the Sudan Service during this same time period, 27 received degrees in history and an additional 12 earned degrees in the Classics.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Figures are from Soffer, *Discipline and Power*, 189-202.

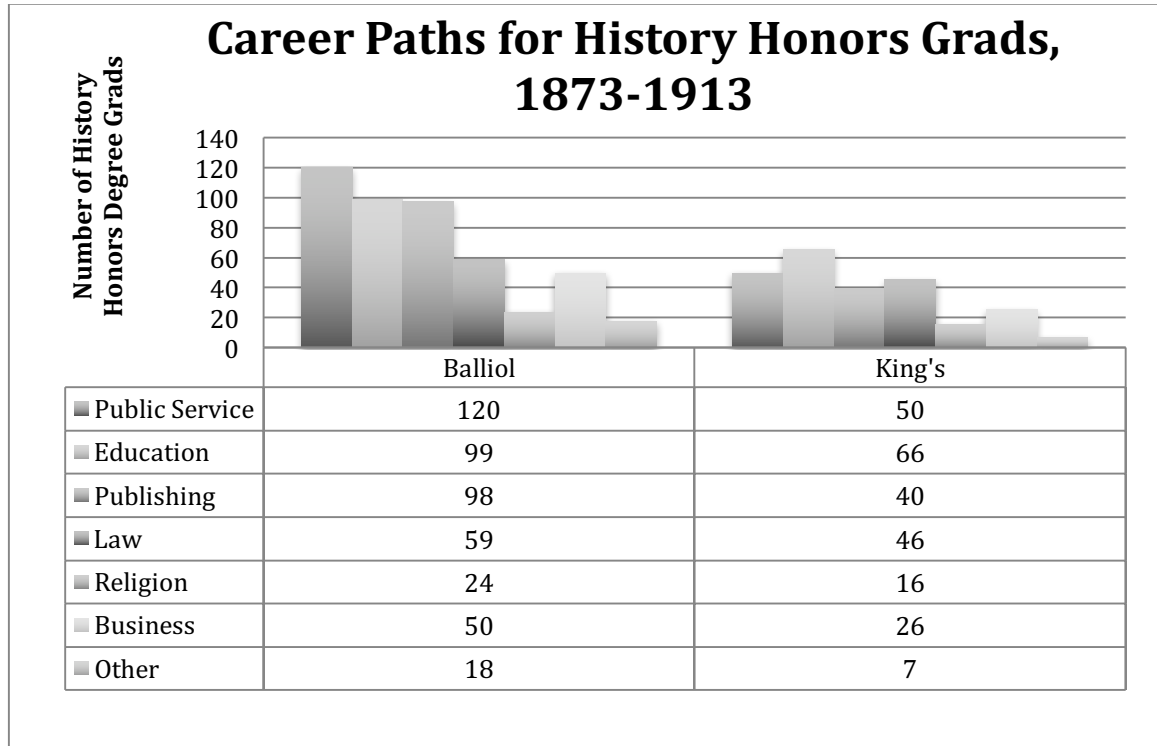
²⁸⁵ Plant, "T.H. Green: citizenship, education, and the law" in Harry Judge ed., *The University and Public Education: the Contribution of Oxford* (London: Routledge, 2013), 20-1.

²⁸⁶ RHO. Furse Papers. "Report on recruitment." 4 January 1920.

²⁸⁷ Statistics from A.H.M Kirk-Greene, "The Sudan Political Service: A profile in the sociology of imperialism", *International Journal of African historical studies* 15 (1982), pp. 36.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

Figure 1.1²⁸⁹



²⁸⁹ Figures from Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power*, 187-88. The Chart represents two influential colleges from Oxford and Cambridge, Balliol and King's, respectively. As Soffer notes in her work, the sum of those in various careers is greater than the total number of first and second class graduates because the same individual may have held as many as five different careers.

Equally as important as the numbers are the reasons *why* so many of these individuals joined the public service. For a large proportion of the products of the Victorian education system, former students left their institutions naturally inclined to pursue occupations they believed to be consistent with their training.²⁹⁰ Service abroad in the Empire, for instance, provided the young philosopher-king with a chance to make an immediate impact for his country. Their entire lives public school and Oxbridge boys had been imbued with a sense of both the importance of public service *and* the awareness that their education was specifically meant to prepare them for a life of leadership. It seemed only natural that, upon graduation, fresh crops of graduates would speedily begin looking to assume a position that corresponded to their educational background. Nowhere could these young men expect to find the responsibility they so desired as they could in the Empire; yet, at the same time, nowhere was the standard so stringent as the imperial civil services. In short, recruiters reserved service in the Empire only for men who most closely embodied the Victorian ideal and, in most instances, those who joined the administrative ranks represented the purest products of the system.

For many young men, the initial draw of Empire was the prospect of adventure and an active lifestyle. Most young men interested in serving abroad considered doing so because they simply could not comprehend spending the bulk of their days indoors, stuck behind a desk in a cramped and dreary office—they were adventurers at heart.²⁹¹ As part of their understanding of manliness acquired during their youth, applicants for the colonial services had grown accustomed to physical industriousness. E.K. Lumley, a District Commissioner in Tanganyika from 1923 to 1944 wrote of his decision to join the C.S.: “I went to Africa to take part in district

²⁹⁰ Gann and Duignan, *Rulers of British Africa*, 202-3.

²⁹¹ RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480 Box 2: File 6, Folio 16: Letter from W.R. Crocker, 16 August, 1960.

administration, not to sit in an office at Headquarters writing legal minutes or investigating somebody's bankruptcy."²⁹² Ultimately, Lumley was drawn to service in Africa by the lure of distant lands, the exhilarating prospect of working among African peoples, and variety of life in the Empire. He wanted a life on his feet, trekking through wilderness and actively engaging with new people. Likewise, Martin S. Kisch, a district officer in Northern Nigeria, became attracted to the idea of service in the Empire because of its promise of "responsibility, adventure, and sport."²⁹³ In sum, most prospects viewed life in the Empire as a man's job and a continuation of the public school and Oxbridge ethos.

Life in the Empire was also a way to break the monotony of one's existence in Britain and to discover some place new and interesting.²⁹⁴ Along with immense amounts of responsibility also came the likelihood of much excitement, many risks, and even danger.

Richard Oakley remembered his decision to serve as a district officer in Africa this way:

Through a lifelong desire to see a leopard and a giraffe in their natural setting, was I drawn towards Africa. There were other reasons, of course, but that was always at the back of my mind...In my application form I had put down Northern Nigeria in preference to southern, as it was a land of big game, ponies, camels, all of which have a fascination for me.²⁹⁵

As a young man, E.A. Temple-Perkins, became interested in service in Uganda because it was

...as near to the dead center of Africa as one can get in British territory. Kenya and Tanganyika Territory were both desirable in their ways, but Zanzibar seemed too small; they all had the sea, which was a strong attraction to one born and bred in the ozone, but Uganda had the huge lakes and more historical background, I thought, and was truly at the very heart of the dark continent.²⁹⁶

²⁹² E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate: British District Officer in Tanganyika* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1976), 60-61.

²⁹³ Martin S. Kisch, *Letters and Sketches from Northern Nigeria* (Chatto & Windus, 1910), xi-xii.

²⁹⁴ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 7.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ RHO. Papers of Eric Arnold Temple-Perkins. Mss.Afr.s.1818. From his unpublished memoirs, *Unadorned Career*, 1.

Kenneth Bradley accepted a position as a district officer after an interview with Ralph Furse, without having ever heard of his assignment. Once his interview was completed, Furse asked him if he would consider going to Northern Rhodesia. Bradley responded that he would, only he had never heard of the place. Ultimately, he accepted the position and “went home to Guernsey with my imagination groping among visions of palm-trees, black men, and elephants to look up Northern Rhodesia in our great *Times Atlas*.”²⁹⁷ Even though the pay could be poor and the death rate high, the Empire promised romance mixed with independence, where one could “escape from the narrow convention and the sound of bells.”²⁹⁸ Whereas loneliness, isolation from one’s family and friends, and the absence of the comforts of home might have represented a drawback to some individuals, for the vast majority of those who enlisted in the C.S. these apparent disadvantages actually represented perks of the job.

Even more importantly, the Empire served as a draw to young men in that it provided many of the same components present in the Victorian school to which they had grown accustomed. A mixture of the elements of service and authority; a clearly defined hierarchical system; freedom and independence of action; and an inherent, built-in belief that they were protecting the weak and spreading British values each acted as an undeniable draw to the Colonial Services and a link to their educational experiences. In fact, many civil servants identified the connection between Empire and their public school. Kenneth Bradley, for instance, wrote of the system of indirect rule in Nigeria:

The theory of Indirect Rule in colonial administration, that is to say, the delegation of power and responsibility to traditional rulers and Chiefs, instituted by Lord Lugard in

²⁹⁷ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 27.

²⁹⁸ RHO. Papers of R.S.T. Cashmore. Mss.Afr.s.1034. From his unpublished memoirs, “Your Obedient Servant,” 30. Also quoted in Gann and Duignan, *Rulers of British Africa*, 203.

Nigeria, was only the prefectorial system writ large, with, *mutatis mutandis*, the DO as the masters, the Chiefs as prefects, and the tribesmen as the boys.²⁹⁹

The benevolent autocracy representative of a life in the Empire would have felt quite familiar to most of these men. Prepared by a generation of Victorian pedagogy in the Arnoldian mold, young administrators set off for the Empire only having truly experienced one type of communal atmosphere. The young district officer had his worldview shaped by likes of Thomas Arnold and Edward Thring who hoped the public school monitorial system would represent “a just law” wherein the weak were protected and power was “lodged in the hands of a comparatively small number, whose character and intellects...fitted them to wield [authority].”³⁰⁰

The diaries, correspondence, memoirs, and even official memoranda of British Government officials are littered with references to their educational careers and romantic interpretations of governance, history, and moral virtue. For instance, such documents are full of Greek and Latin phrases and, quite often, directly connected the lessons of the ancients with their own daily work.³⁰¹ One such example was Charles William Orr, a colonial civil servant assigned to the British Colony of Northern Nigeria from 1903 to 1906. During his tenure in Nigeria, Orr became one of Lord Lugard’s most trusted Residents and a very respected senior official.³⁰² In writing to family a friend, Orr quoted Socrates in an attempt to describe the characteristics of the ideal government administrator in the Empire:

‘A good man’ he [Socrates] says, and I simply substitute the word Resident [district officer] for man ‘is happy within himself...kind to his friend, temperate to his enemy,

²⁹⁹ Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 15-16.

³⁰⁰ Thring, *Education and School*, 264; Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, 362.

³⁰¹ The most obvious illustration is Ralph Furse’s own memoirs, *Aucuparius*. Also see, Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 108-112.

³⁰² For Orr’s reputation in Nigeria, James Patrick Hubbard, *Education under colonial rule: A history of Katsina College, 1921-1942* (University Press of America, 2000), 8; Langa, Langa [H.B. Hermon-Hodge], *Up Against it in Northern Nigeria* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 39; RHO. Grier Papers. “Letter to Dorothy,” December 17, 1906.

religiously just, indefatigably laborious and discharges all duties with a courage and conformity of action.³⁰³

From their school days, Orr and many men like him were both well-read in the Classics and British history, and also adopted a very specific narrative of their country's past. Throughout his career, Orr travelled with a copy of a newspaper clipping, dating from October of 1905, which recounted the centenary celebrations held in London in honor of the Battle of Trafalgar. The clipping, which Orr kept in his diary so that he “might see it everyday,” read

In the transition-eye of individual responsibilities which has now come on Nelson's England, it is well to be reminded that all national reforms must begin in the conscience of the individual, that each man must uplift himself to a higher place of endeavor if the whole people is to be lifted up, that Parliament can give us no more than we give to Parliament.³⁰⁴

Orr's self-described “favorite book,” was Richard Green's *Short History of the English Peoples*, which lauds Britain as the “mother of nations,” meant to share “not only her blood and her speech, but the freedom which she had won.”³⁰⁵ These works he shared as morsels of advice with numerous district officers and acquaintances who sought to understand the aims of British imperialism. For many, Orr was representative of the ideal government administrator in the Empire. H.B. Hermon-Hodge, a DO who served alongside Orr, recounted that “anyone wishing to get a grip of what we [British colonial administrators] are ‘driving at’ [in Nigeria], and how

³⁰³ United Kingdom. British Library, London [BLL]. Charles William Orr Letters: Mss 56100. Letter to Miss Levisieur, February 6, 1904 from camp in Northern Nigeria. Although Orr, himself, did not attend a ‘Clarendon School’, the date of his education placed him at in school at the height of the proliferation of ideas of education for leadership that had, by then, become commonplace even outside of the so-called ‘great schools’. In the opinion of one of Ralph Furse's colleagues, W.R. Crocker, the University Orr attended—Woolwich—was seen as being nearly equivalent to Oxford or Cambridge in terms of status. For this see, RHO. “Heussler Papers” Mss.Brit.Emp.s.480. Box 2: File 6, Folio 16: Letter to Heussler from W.R. Crocker, 16 August, 1960.

³⁰⁴ BLL. Charles William Orr Letters: Mss 56100. “Letter to Miss Levisieur” March 22, 1906.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. “Letter to Miss Levisieur” February 17, 1904.

we go about it cannot do better than [Orr's own interpretations of British stewardship]."³⁰⁶ As a representation of the district officer's's mindset, Orr's example illustrates the lasting impressions of Victorian education in the lives of administrators and public servants in the Empire.

Just as Arnold romanticized the very nature of government and education, so too did many of his students once they entered into the wider world. One of Arnold's fundamental concerns was the just application of power and what he termed "the great work of government."³⁰⁷ The British educational system's idealism manifested itself in the lives of its graduates and a great many future district officers sought a job in the C.S. for service's sake.³⁰⁸ Charles Orr learned to do much more at school than to just quote Socrates; in many ways he also embodied the romantic conceptions of Britain's role in the world that became so synonymous with the British intellectual climate of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Above all, Orr wrote when serving as a DO in Northern Nigeria, "character," not "genius" spelled success in life, and he personally aimed to carry over that standard of "character" to his own work, while also inspiring it in others with whom he served.³⁰⁹ Orr frequently described himself as a "fanatical Englishman" who believed "in the destiny of England...in passing on to others the ideas of justice, liberty, and law." On numerous occasions throughout his career, Orr viewed imperialism as being an essential element of being an Englishman. When serving in Africa, he wrote, "one

³⁰⁶ Langa, Langa [H.B. Hermon-Hodge], *Up Against it in Northern Nigeria*, 39.

³⁰⁷ Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, as quoted in Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe*, 3.

³⁰⁸ Anthony Kirk-Greene, *Symbols of Authority: the British District Officer in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 16. Kirk-Greene argues that Robert Heussler got it wrong when he argued that family influence and aristocratic backgrounds were the strongest motivators for a man when he considered joining the C.S. Instead, Kirk-Greene rightly argues that most of C.S. men in Africa were from the middle classes and service was their driving motivation for a life in the Empire.

³⁰⁹ Soffer, *Discipline and Power*.

feels one is doing some real solid good.”³¹⁰ While working as an administrator in Northern Nigeria Orr frequently wrote letters to Assistant Residents serving under him, sharing his personal philosophy: “My rule in life,” he said, “is to keep the highest ideals in front of me and to work up to them by the most practical methods possible.” Then, quoting Emerson, Orr wrote, “Hitch your wagon to a star,” and he added, “keep it hitched there...let us devote our entire attention to keeping our traces taut and our wheels greased.”³¹¹ If, the British Empire ever reached a point where its only aim was the “selfish grasping of power,” Orr contended,

I will not ask that England should remain great and I will bear to see it tumble into decay, for I consider that greatness should not be given except to those who are worthy of being great. But I believe in England, with all its faults and in any case the best I can do as an individual is to myself at least strive continuously after those ideals which I firmly believe are a part of the English character.³¹²

Another administrator in the Northern Nigerian Service, Richard Oakley, described the district officer’s’s job this way:

It is his [the DO’s] job—the good of the native...This is in fact the Political Officers job, so to tutor the subject-race that it can stand upon its own feet. To do this the dominant race must rule altruistically, which does not mean weakly or sentimentally, but fairly and justly, as one would bring up a child, and it must not withdraw that guiding hand, which should at times, if need be, hold the rod, until its child, the subject race, has grown up, so that it too can rule in an altruistic manner.³¹³

³¹⁰ [BLL]. Charles William Orr Letters: Mss 56100. “Letter to Miss Levisieur.” February 17, 1904.

³¹¹ “Obituary.” *London Times* [London, England] 30 April 1945: 6; Also quoted in Ibid. “Letter to Miss Levisieur,” November 6, 1904. This particular Emerson quote was a favorite with Orr and it was one that he seemed inclined to share quite often with multiple parties. He expressed this sentiment to Miss Levisieur, a family friend whom he had met while visiting South Africa, and Sir Selwyn Grier, a close friend and colleague with whom Orr had served in Northern Nigeria. This expression of Orr’s clearly left a lasting impact on Grier as the latter included it in the writing of Orr’s obituary following his death in April of 1945.

³¹² [BLL]. Charles William Orr Letters: Mss 56100. “Letter to Miss Levisieur.” February 17, 1904.

³¹³ Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 8-11.

In the same way older boys took responsibility for their younger, weaker charges at public school, many colonial civil servants viewed their duty to be much the same in Africa, India, and elsewhere—to protect and uplift. After writing these words, Oakley recalled a chance encounter he had as a young district officer in Nigeria with a group of six fellow colonial servicemen who had just come out to Africa after completing their service in the First World War. Sitting together at one of the bar tables, the men talked and drank late into the night. They spoke of their service in the war and what lay ahead of them as newly minted servants of the Empire. Late into the night, Oakley finally asked his fellow comrades what drove them to come to work for HMG in Africa. Candidly, every one of them, according to Oakley, responded in a similar fashion:

each in turn said that he could not bring himself to work solely for his own ends, but wished to do something to further the interests of the Empire, and that this work which he had taken up appealed to him as being ‘a man’s job’.³¹⁴

In such instances of candor, so common of these kinds of late night discussions, one must pause to appreciate the authenticity of the moment. Herein lies the honesty with which so many men left Britain’s shores to pursue service for service’s sake. Even after sacrificing themselves for the war effort, the call to duty resonated within them to such a degree that they wasted little time finding another means of assisting their country. These six served as living, breathing proof that Victorian ideology, however flawed, influenced them deeply. In his compelling study of the mind of the Indian Civil Service, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes*, historian Clive Dewey wrote of his principle subject, Frank Bayne: “he [Bayne] arrived in the Punjab determined to breathe fresh life into the patriarchal tradition. He wanted, more than anything else, to be the *mabap*: a mother

³¹⁴ Ibid, 17-18.

and father to his people.”³¹⁵ Seen in this light, it is difficult to view the paternalistic instincts of so many colonial administrators as a mere ruse meant only for personal gain.

A further benchmark example of this kind of attitude can be illustrated through the life and career of John Rutherford Postlethwaite, who served for more than two decades as a Provincial Commissioner for the Colonial Civil Service in the British Protectorate of Uganda.³¹⁶ Before entering the Service, Postlethwaite’s life was quite typical of the average colonial bureaucrat. Entering Haileybury College at the age of 13, Postlethwaite spent a total of five years at public school before joining the colonial civil services, where he remained from 1909 to 1932. Not only was Postlethwaite a veteran of the C.S., but also upon the conclusion of his career he continued to act as an advisee for aspiring servicemen in the process of completing their degrees.³¹⁷ Postlethwaite frequently gave lectures at public schools and universities, sharing with students his experiences in the Empire and explaining to them the key features of life in the Empire. Additionally, prospective applicants to the C.S. often visited Postlethwaite at his home in Surrey to seek his advice.³¹⁸ In describing his experiences with these ambitious hopefuls, Postlethwaite described three types of candidates he encountered on a regular basis. Postlethwaite described the first breed as the “calculating young gentleman” who concerned himself, above all, with the prestige of the service. According to Postlethwaite, these “calculating gentlemen” were only interested in what they could gain, personally and professionally, through a career in the Empire. As for the first group, Postlethwaite admitted,

[They] make me boil...if I feel irritable that morning, I’m afraid I’m usually very rude. ‘My good fool,’ I reply, ‘it isn’t a question of whether the Service is good enough for

³¹⁵ Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), 45-6.

³¹⁶ RHO. John Rutherford Postlethwaite Papers. GB 0162 MSS.Afr.s.2007

³¹⁷ Postlethwaite, *I look Back*, 144-147.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, 144.

you; it's a question of whether you can ever make yourself good enough for the Service'.³¹⁹

The second variety of individual who considered a life in the Empire, according to Postlethwaite, might best be described as the aggressive rogue. In Postlethwaite's experience, this young man "blows in" and says "he thinks it would be pretty good value to get out to a big game country, ride about on a horse, and boss up the niggers."³²⁰ Of this particular sort Postlethwaite proclaimed, "I haven't much time for him and I tell him that he'd hate it, that in a very large part of Africa there are no horses...and that we don't call the Africans niggers, but natives..."³²¹ In Postlethwaite's estimation, the Empire was no place for the brazen, the overly-ambitious, or the crude. To him, the Empire was the home of the gentleman: one who took a genuine concern for their work and the peoples placed under their charge. The abrasive attitude of the aggressive rogue proved that he had no business in the Empire, as he was self-centered and immature.

Then, according to Postlethwaite, occasionally a third kind of man would come and see him. This man was generally

...somewhat shy of expressing his feelings, who tells me that he has always, since a small boy, been interested in Africa, that he doesn't want to seem superior or anything of that kind, but he'd loathe a life of just making money; that he'd like to try and do something a bit useful, and do I think he'd have a chance of getting in to the African Service?³²²

This class of man truly interested Postlethwaite. For this rare sort of man, Postlethwaite provided a deeper sort of explanation of the true nature of the service:

I ask him if he has thought of the long time of service abroad and of the distance he'll be from his home...I point out that the climate might not prove healthy for him, that though the pay is pretty good at the start, he won't ever be a rich man; in fact, if he marries, he'll

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid, 144-5.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

be an extremely poor one. I tell him that his pension will be enough to live on, but that there won't be much for luxury and amusement in his old age; and that normally he'll find himself on the beach, as the sailors say, fairly early in life, and that he won't like having to take a back seat while men who are his senior in age have still the interest of their jobs....And if, after all this, he says, as I have had said to me, "yes, sir, I know all that, but it's the life I want," then I'm really interested, and I try and advise him what to do to reach his goal.³²³

If, in taking all of this into consideration, the third type of man sought to take his place in the Empire, Postlethwaite believed that both the man and the Empire would be better for it. For the right sort, the Empire was the home "of all that for which the healthy young English male of the ruling classes has a hereditary and traditional liking"—it was a place for responsibility, purpose, duty, and adventure.³²⁴ Furthermore, according to Postlethwaite, this particular blend of gentleman would be "blessed with the advantage of 'good companions', fellow officers whose language he understands and amongst whom he cannot fail to make friendships worth having."³²⁵

In short, Britons who set out for the Empire typically left the Isles with a deep sense of romantic longing. There was a purpose behind their going, and *duty* was the most important consideration. The public school inculcated young men with a desire for public service—it created an entire culture of administration—and nowhere offered such an immediate and dramatic sense of purpose as the Empire; nor could the young public school man find anywhere a more ambitious job—uplifting entire civilizations to responsible self-government. In the minds of Orr, Postlethwaite, Oakley, and innumerable other DOs, there was no room in the Empire for the 'calculating' young gentleman, the overly aggressive and excessively ambitious rogue, the intellectual, or the idle; instead, they reserved it for the service-minded, the gentleman, the

³²³ Ibid, 145-6.

³²⁴ Ibid, 147.

³²⁵ Ibid.

philistine, the energetic, and the balanced. What remains, then, is to compare the rhetoric with the reality.

Conclusion:

It is difficult to overestimate the effects of the Arnoldian system of public school education in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth-century. The groundwork Arnold laid at Rugby became the standard for all of Britain's so-called 'great schools' and was expanded upon by other educators of like mind, such as Edward Thring, G.E.L. Cotton, and Cyril Norwood. Together, their emphasis on character, manliness, duty, and service taught an entire generation of young men that it was their destiny to lead. In the tender age of their adolescence, a selection of young boys were removed from their homes and inserted into a completely separate and artificial community that acted by a different set of rules from the outside world. They were totally inundated into the prefectorial hierarchy, chocked full of ancient lessons about the honor in sacrifice, and warned of the disgrace that came with the failure to do one's duty. After nine, sometimes ten, years in this type of environment, the public school universe became these young men's reality. When they finally re-emerged into society, they did so only once they were deeply imbibed with the Arnoldian worldview.

For some, this initial phase of life was followed by an equally intensive and formative period at Oxford and Cambridge. Life in these institutions was no less rigid and no less artificial than it had been in public school. Here, their moral education continued, as did the emphasis on education for leadership. Dr. Edward Pusey's determination to make "not books, but men" acted as a natural transition from boy's earlier lives. Not only did they continue to be taught to subordinate their selfish ambition in favor of the "common good," but they also acquired a very specific reading of their own nation's history. Britain, they were told, was a land with a long and

convoluted history. In sum, the story of their island consisted of two vastly different phases—both including stories of struggle. The first phase consisted of Britain’s own internal struggle in which its people sought to defend their God-given constitutional liberties and achieve final protection from would-be oppressors. This era reached its victorious conclusion in 1689 with the ascension of William III and the resulting downfall of the tyrannical Stuarts. Phase two was a much different story, one defined by necessity—the necessity and responsibility of the British people to share their values and civilization abroad with the so-called ‘less fortunate’ and ‘underdeveloped’. Armed with confidence instilled in them during their public school days and the clarity of their historical mission, emphasized at the university, some of these men entered their adult lives determined to find purpose, meaning, and responsibility.

Certainly, this general narrative could not be said to be true of most—or, indeed, many—graduates of these institutions. As has been seen above, there was no shortage of critics of the ‘great school’ system of education. However, what is truly significant is that the architects of the colonial service, namely Sir Ralph Furse, established a system of recruitment wherein conformity to the ideals of the Arnoldian system and the Oxbridge ethos were prerequisites to admission into the colonial services. Furse and his team laboriously sought out those who demonstrated a fundamental devotion to public school values. Furse sought out men that were most representative of the system—the prefects, the head-boys, and the favorites of the dons. Furse touted the momentousness of the one-on-one interview as a means of determining whether or not a young candidate embodied all of the qualities of a pure public school product. Naturally, the system was not perfect. Not everyone who passed a rigorous interview with Furse stood as a paragon of character-driven service. But, in the majority of cases Furse did his best to ensure that men he sent off into the empire stood as the purest product of the Arnoldian

environment. At the height of Britain's imperial experiment, those selected for the colonial services stood as the outcome of a deeply engrained culture, which defined their worldview entirely. What remains, then, is answer the question of how this worldview manifested itself when young administrators made their way into the Empire. Such is the purpose of Part II.

III. The Sons of Martha

*The sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited
that good part;
But the Sons of Martha favour their Mother of the
careful soul and the troubled heart.
And because she lost her temper once, and because she
was rude to the Lord her Guest,
Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons, world without
end, reprieve, or rest.
It is their care in all the ages to take the buffet and
cushion the shock.
It is their care that the gear engages; it is their care that
the switches lock.
It is their care that the wheels run truly; it is their care
to embark and entrain,
Tally, transport, and deliver duly the Sons of Mary by
land and main...*

—Rudyard Kipling, *The Sons of Martha* (1907)

Even for the average Briton of the first half of the 20th century, the district officer was not the recognizable symbol of the Empire, but the grey man who served in the shadows. To borrow Rudyard Kipling's phrase, he was the Son of Martha—the man who took all the blame when things went wrong, and the one who received little to no praise when victories (big or small) were won. Anonymity was often the unacknowledged price of admission into the colonial civil services. Perhaps surprisingly, even among his contemporaries the district officer remained a relative unknown. Though one political commentator in 1918 publically expressed his feeling that the colonial civil servant in Africa acted as “the pivot on whom all colonial administration in Africa turns,” he still reluctantly admitted, “he [the district officer] is rather an inarticulate creature living his active life in laborious silence...”³²⁶ A veteran of the Nigerian civil service, added, “so few people at home understand [the duties of the district officer] and it is the same out

³²⁶ *The Manchester Guardian* L.B., “District Officer.” August 7, 1934. (page 5).

there [in the Empire]. Non-officials do not understand...[and] members of the Government departments only partially comprehend.”³²⁷

Remarkably, this very same image held true even for the rulers of the British Raj in India. Although famed for its efficiency and exclusivity, very few Britons appreciated at the time just how much of an administrative marvel the Raj truly was—still less did they comprehend the indispensable role played by the Indian Civil Service [ICS] to the survival of Britain’s imperial government. While responsible for hundreds of millions of colonial subjects, at no time did the Raj employ more than 1250 Indian Civil Servants to govern the entire subcontinent.³²⁸ In 1930, one contributor to the *Manchester Guardian*, J.L. Garvin, attempted to tackle the public’s ignorance regarding the ICS. In his editorial, Garvin argued that the Indian Civil Service had been betrayed by its very name. The simple term, “civil service,” he contended, “implies to the ordinary citizen at home an interminable vista of desks and drawers, of pigeon-holes and dossiers, of official tape, stationery, and sealing wax, with numberless secretaries and clerks attached to the bureaucratic apparatus.”³²⁹ Garvin implored his readership to recognize that “no imagination could be further from the facts of the Indian scene.”³³⁰ In all reality, he wrote, “that handful [the ICS] actuate the entire clockwork of an Imperial administration more extensive than that of Ancient Rome.”³³¹

³²⁷ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 8.

³²⁸ BLL. The Indian Civil Service: Survivors Remember the Raj. Mss. Eur. C847. *Indo-British Review: A Journal of History, Volume XXII*. Nos. 1-2, Parts I&II. Phillip Mason, “Setting the Scene.”; Also see Phillip Mason, *The Men Who Ruled India* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1985); See also Anthony Kirk-Green, *Britain’s Imperial Administrators, 1858-1966* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 91. Kirk-Greene has the number at 1255, dating to the end of World War I.

³²⁹ *The Manchester Guardian*, J.L. Garvin, “Britain in India,” June 22, 1930 (page 14).

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

Regardless of how hard they tried, though, Garvin and others in the know could do little to dispel the colonial civil servant's misguided reputation. Beyond the persistence of stereotypes, one contributing factor to the British public's fledgling comprehension of the importance of the colonial civil services likely had to do with the convoluted nature of the organizational framework of the Empire as a whole. Even to the most informed student of the period, the bureaucratic structure of the British Empire in the late 19th and 20th centuries can appear quite opaque. Thus, before one can truly hope to comprehend the vast importance of the colonial civil servant, a word or two must be said about the basic system in which he worked. By 1910, the British Empire consisted of two major entities: the self-governing Dominions—namely, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand—and the Dependent Empire.³³² In general terms, this latter category included India (placed under the authority of the Indian Office in 1858) and the remainder of Britain's territorial holdings in Africa and Asia (overseen by the Colonial Office).³³³ Although the Colonial Service for the Dependent Empire was not officially established as a unified body until 1930, the existence of a formally sanctioned imperial bureaucracy can be traced back to 1837 when Parliament issued its first list of Colonial Regulations for its overseas administrators and servants.³³⁴ Before 1930, each individual territory in the Dependent Empire acted as its own governmental establishment with its own administrative framework. Thus, still three decades into the 20th century the Empire consisted of twenty-six separate governmental bureaucracies, each entirely independent of the rest.³³⁵ Rather than being a part of one, unified Colonial Service, colonial bureaucrats belonged to individual

³³² Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, 211-212.

³³³ Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 2.

³³⁴ Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service*, 8-9; 15-16.

³³⁵ Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 2.

establishments.³³⁶ In short, instead of one Colonial Service, there were many imperial civil services until 1930—the Nigerian service, the Gold Coast service, the Tanganyikan service, the Malayan service, and the Indian Civil Service, just to name a few.

In an effort to increase order and efficiency within the Dependent Empire for the purposes of tax collection, the maintenance of law and order, and so forth, the Indian and Colonial Offices broke Britain's territories down into smaller, more manageable administrative entities. Correspondingly, the British Government placed each individual unit under the administration of a number of high-ranking officials and bureaucrats. At the top of the colonial hierarchy in much of the Dependent Empire was the Governor. Nominally, the Governor was directly responsible to the sitting monarch although, in reality, he reported to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.³³⁷ In sum, the colonial governor acted as the head of state in his respective colony. As Lord Lugard wrote in his *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* in 1926, the governor's role constituted a complicated mixture of king and prime minister.³³⁸ Stationed at Government House, often in the colony's capital, an institutional entity, known as the Secretariat, assisted the governor with his duties and was responsible for ensuring his orders were executed. By and large, secretariat work generally consisted of paper work involving minuting and drafting of official documentation.³³⁹ At the head of the Secretariat was the chief secretary who acted as the right hand of the governor and, occasionally, ruled in his absence. Below the central administration, each territory was further divided into provinces, placed under

³³⁶ Ibid, 3.

³³⁷ The position of Secretary of State for the Colonies was established in 1768 as a means of regulating Britain's North American colonies. The real turning point for the position, though, came in 1854 with the creation of an autonomous Colonial Office that had previously been attached to the War Office, since 1801.

³³⁸ Sir F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh, 1926), 95.

³³⁹ RHO. Heussler Papers, "Letter to Heussler from Charles Jefferies." October 22, 1960.

the charge of a senior officer, commonly known in Africa as the Provincial Commissioner. Subdivided further, the Colonial Office then separated each province into districts and sub-districts, placed under the authority of the district officer and his staff.³⁴⁰

It is here, at the district level of the colonial government, that one can truly grasp the nature of the British Empire. In an article published in *The National Review* in June of 1901, Charles Roe, a thirty-five year veteran of the Indian Civil Service, put down on to paper what virtually all colonial civil servants understood, but few outside their ranks acknowledged: “the ‘District’” he wrote, “is the real unit of administration” and “the District Officer is the pivot on which the administration turns.”³⁴¹ In spite of the lack of recognition and the absence of a formally unified Colonial Service before 1930, the district officer proved undoubtedly to be the most important figure in the colonial setting. He provided a unifying voice that created a semblance of constancy across the Empire, regardless of the locale. Despite the lack of *organizational* uniformity before 1930, the culture of service-mindedness, developed as a result of their shared background, created a remarkable degree of commonality in terms of both tangible and ideological approaches toward administration.

To provide an exhaustive list of the district officer’s titles and responsibilities would be an exercise in futility. There was no limit to the work he performed on a day-to-day basis. In the words of Frank Loughland, who served as a political officer in the Kigoma-Ujiji region of Tanganyika from 1920 to 1924, “there was no daily ‘stint’. How could there be? Who knew

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 5. It is important to point out that the titles of these figures were subject to change based on the time and place under consideration. In Nigeria, for instance, the Provincial Commissioner went by the title of Resident. Occasionally, as Kirk-Greene points out, a number of provinces might be grouped together and placed under the administration of a Chief Commissioner or a figure, known as the Lieutenant-Governor. For clarity, the terms governor, chief secretary, provincial commissioner, district officer, and assistant district officer will be used to denote each respective office.

³⁴¹ Charles Roe, “The Civil Service as a Career” *The National Review* (37.220) June 1901, 576.

what would turn up at any time on any day?”³⁴² Loughland, like countless other district officers, noted the ever-changing nature of their jobs to be one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the life of a colonial civil servant. While standing as an assistant district officer in Teso, Uganda from 1918 to 1922, Eric Arnold Temple-Perkins acted as the local Chief Justice, the Treasurer, the Commissioner of Police and Prisons, the Registrar of births, deaths and marriages; he was chairman of the town council; and the director of public works, education and agriculture. Furthermore, in the particularly isolated regions of his district, Temple-Perkins also sometimes took up the post of medical officer.³⁴³ During a particularly trying time in his career in Africa, he remembered

I have vivid recollections of spending many days in Teso, during an epidemic of cerebrospinal meningitis, touring certain areas with a few African assistants and painting hundreds of throats with iodine. I also remember the incessant trouble we had trying to cope with the rat menace as a means of combatting bubonic plague...after a particularly bad outbreak of plague, I organized an intensive campaign [of rat killing] and offered a reward of one cent per rat's tail.³⁴⁴

Most of the major colonies by the turn of century had their own medical officers appointed to the various districts who were responsible for providing relief and treating patients—both African and European. However, rarely did a district (usually larger than the size of the average English county) have more than one, perhaps two, medical officers. As such, it was fairly common for the district officer and his assistants to bear some of the responsibilities and do the best they could to treat those who had been stricken with an ailment or incurred some type of physical injury.

³⁴² RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480. Box 4, File 1, Folio 58: “Responses to questions posed to Frank Longland,” 27 April 1965.

³⁴³ RHO. Memoirs of E.A. Temple-Perkins entitled, “Unadorned Career,” 1925-1954, Mss. Afr. s. 1818, Box 9, page 6.

³⁴⁴ Ibid; Also see RHO. Correspondence of High Middleton Brice-Smith. Mss. Afr. S.1845. Letter posted Friday March 25, 1909.

Immediately, one can see the immense difficulty in attempting to surmise the district officer's profession. In less than four years on the job as a colonial administrator, Temple-Perkins found himself serving as district policeman, doctor, jailer, superintendent of education, and master of virtually every conceivable civic jurisdiction, not to mention his forays into rat killing. And still, the district officer's's duties did not end here. Very often, the district officer also had to assume the occupation of engineer and agriculturalist. One of Selwyn McGregor Grier's chief tasks as assistant district officer to Zaria Province in Northern Nigeria from 1909 to 1911 was overseeing the construction of the Zaria and Bauchi railway lines.³⁴⁵ Grier's responsibilities, however, were not merely limited to surveying, inspecting, and supervising the laying of track, but also included organizing, housing, and feeding African laborers assembled to complete the rail line. For Grier, managing the labor force was at least equally as challenging as the engineering work. In August of 1909, in the midst of the railroad project, Grier wrote his sister, Dorothy:

I have got to face the situation [of feeding the laborers] and as far as I can see this will shortly become a starvation camp! It is extraordinary the way people will not realize that men must be fed, and that the feeding of railway laborers needs as careful organization as the feeding of an army.³⁴⁶

Likewise, agricultural production was yet another, though related, business of the district officer. Across the Empire, colonial officials remained in constant fear of the outbreak of famine. Accordingly, the colonial civil servant had to situate himself as a well-informed amateur in the art of agricultural production. Writing in his diary while serving as a district officer in Northern Rhodesia, Kenneth Bradley wrote, "I cannot look out of my tent without seeing (a) erosion, (b)

³⁴⁵ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379. Box 1/9. Ff.1-13. "Letter to his sister, Dorothy" August 1, 1909.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

deforestation, (c) over-population—and, oddly enough, a market-garden.”³⁴⁷ In the same breath, Bradley fretted,

It is all very well to talk, for instance of agricultural education. One man in ten will eagerly learn to contour a ridge and rotate his crops, but there is no time to teach the other nine. It would take a generation, and if these hillsides are to be preserved it must be done next year. So the other nine have to be *compelled*—and that, in these days of Indirect Rule and enlightened democracy, raises a whole set of other problems, purely political.³⁴⁸

It fell to the district officer to both be aware of, and ward off, the causes of famine within his jurisdiction. He was also responsible for determining if famine conditions existed; yet, this also included extremely difficult challenges. To E.K. Lumley, who served as a political officer in Tanganyika after the First World War, “Reporting the existence of a famine to Government can be risky. Famine relief is costly, and it was necessary to be sure of the facts before calling for it. It was therefore essential for me to make a thorough personal investigation.”³⁴⁹ Thus, beyond his civic duties, the district officer also found himself responsible for the erection and maintenance of colonial infrastructures; he needed to become an ‘expert’ in irrigation techniques, land preservation, soil management, as well as countless other agricultural methods; and the colonial government viewed him as the first line of defense against food shortages, starvation, and the outbreak of disease. Significantly, as Lumley rightly stated, all of these concerns, and more, demanded the personal touch of the district officer³⁵⁰ Notably, it is important to consider at this point that this laundry list of duties is far from what one typically envisions when pondering the activities of a clichéd bureaucrat.

Also while stationed in his district outpost, political officers might be expected to perform any number of other miscellaneous tasks, including acting as host for any and all

³⁴⁷ Kenneth Bradley, *Diary of District Officer*, 164-5.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 36.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

visitors. The colonial governments in India and Africa required district officers to entertain (not to mention provide room and board) official visitors to their district. Political officers, regardless of rank, dispensed a great deal of support to visiting Viceroys, Governors, government officers and even military authorities who needed provisions while inspecting or passing through the district headquarters.³⁵¹

Apart from the assorted obligations listed above, the district officer was also a political officer and the chief representative of the central administration to virtually every local community outside of the capital. The district officer, in the case of Northern Nigeria for instance, served in an advisory role to local chiefs and other native administrative bodies and organizations. It was his job to acquire an intimate knowledge of the people within his district, particularly the immensely influential local chiefs and elders. According to Temple-Perkins, one had to “study the characters of hundreds of chiefs and others and know them sufficiently to make sanction of any new appointments.”³⁵² In other words, though the power of appointment technically rested in the hands of the governor of the colony or, occasionally the chief secretary, the district officer acted as the eyes and ears for the central government. Colonial governors and their secretariats rarely made appointments for positions in the native administration without first summoning the district officer’s recommendation.³⁵³ Therefore, not only did the central administration expect the colonial civil servant to govern, it also commanded that he be its link to the people of the colony.

³⁵¹ Kew. The National Archives [TNA]. CO 583/71: Report by Sir Alexander Wood Renton, entitled “Special Commission to investigate the cost of living of Government Servants” August 16, 1918.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa*. As historian Robert Heussler details, it was also not completely uncommon for district officers to appoint chiefs on his own authority. For this, see Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*.

Most district officers believed constant contact with the ‘natives’ (a term they used habitually) to be the only guaranteed means of acquainting themselves with local communities.³⁵⁴ In general terms, the district officer sought to establish relationships with his colonial subjects in one of two ways. First, in most African districts, was the Boma—the district officer’s own local headquarters. Although typical office hours ranged from roughly 7 am to 2 pm, according to Frank Loughland, “the door of the Boma was open all day, and sometimes at night a native would knock you up about some matter.”³⁵⁵ Frankly, Loughland asserted, the district officer “did everything” simply because “there was no one else to do it.”³⁵⁶ On any given day, he remembered,

You might get a report of a man being killed by a lion, or a woman murdered by her lover. You might get a white hunter concerned with licenses and game laws. An Indian trader might come in about opening a new store in a distant village—the variety is endless... There was something to do all the time and for as long as you liked to work. In other words, your duties did not depend on routine, but on how hard you were prepared to work.³⁵⁷

In essence, one way that the district officer made himself known to his people, and *vice versa*, was by always keeping his door open. Anyone who sought the government’s help or wished to voice a grievance might find his or her way to the district officer’s office. This kind of activity was in striking contrast to the activities at Government House. If one looked for government assistance, he or she made their way to the district officer’s doorstep. It would have been virtually unthinkable for an average colonial subject to report his or her problem directly to the

³⁵⁴ Frequently the D.O. recognized himself as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the government. For example see, Charles Roe, “The Civil Service as a Career” *The National Review* (37.220) (June, 1901), 577; BLL. Memorandum of the Effect of the Reforms from a D.O.s point of view. Mss.Eur.D714/5; John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, 237-38;

³⁵⁵ RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480. Box 4, File 1, Folio 58: “Responses to questions posed to Frank Longland,” 27 April 1965.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

Governor or Chief Secretary of the colony. In one extremely telling instance Donald Cameron, the governor of Tanganyika from 1925 to 1931, recorded in his memoirs, perhaps somewhat regretfully, “I saw Chiefs who told me that they had heard that there was an English Governor somewhere on the coast, but they had never seen him and were somewhat skeptical of his existence.”³⁵⁸ While rare for the great man, close-working relationships with local communities exemplified an integral part of the district officer’s day. So much could be learned, they argued, through listening to complaints, keeping an ear open to local gossip, and casually conversing with all comers. Through these various types of personal interaction, the colonial civil servant attained an unparalleled comprehension of local affairs.³⁵⁹

Long periods of travel constituted the second, and arguably most important, way a district officer connected with local communities under his dominion. “Trekking” or “touring” one’s district was an absolutely crucial part of the district officer’s’s job description. Before the widespread availability of the railroad and the motor car, not popularized until the 1930s as means of transportation for the administrative officer, the most common way for a colonial civil servant to tour his district was travelling by foot, bicycle, or on horseback. The typically large size of a district officer’s’s charge made such travel a constant necessity if he truly sought to establish a rapport with local villages. Yet, this was not easily done and required immense effort. Selwyn Grier’s own division of Zaria Province in Northern Nigeria, for instance, constituted some 12,500 square miles of territory, and comprised of approximately half a million people.³⁶⁰ In his first tour as a member of the Service, Grier covered some five hundred and

³⁵⁸ Donald Cameron, *My Tanganyika Service*, 53.

³⁵⁹ Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 109; Also see, Kenneth Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 75.

³⁶⁰ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, February 10, 1910

twenty miles by foot and horseback over the course of a three-month period.³⁶¹ Also, very often the conditions of travel were especially difficult. For starters, the district officer had to bring with him all the supplies he would need, including a retinue of African servants to cook, carry his wares, and make camp. Furthermore, district officers frequently had to chart their own course and travel through dense forest or over steep and treacherous terrain. Explaining these conditions to his sister in a letter posted in 1910, Grier commented:

One talks of roads, but elsewhere one finds one's way along bush paths with the grass brushing one's shoulders and head on either side. At this moment it is pouring with rain. I was lucky enough to get in and get my tent put up before one thunderstorm burst, and now a second one has followed hard on its tracks... I took an impromptu bath some months ago when trying to ford [a river]. That river was then [before the rains] perhaps 120 yards across—it is now 500 yards... The speed with which these rivers rise is absolutely incredible.³⁶²

For weeks, and very often months at a time, Grier trekked across the vast Northern Nigerian wilderness in order to, as he put it, “keep in touch with the outlying districts to see that everything is progressing well.”³⁶³ E.K. Lumley added of his service in Africa, “much of [my] travelling on foot had to be carried out in tsetse-infested country, and I have walked twenty miles in a day being bitten almost every yard.”³⁶⁴ Despite these hardships, Lumley contended:

If foot travel was at times irksome and uncomfortable, it had its political advantages. It meant that the D.O became conversant with almost every inch of his District, and was in contact with most of its people. On the road he would meet travellers and talk to them, passing the time of day and gathering information about their activities and means of livelihood. In these wayside conversations he learned much about the affairs of the tribe and the conduct of the village headmen and other Native Authorities. He gathered more information when he pitched his tent for the night in the headman's village. After he had made a series of these journeys on foot the inhabitants would have got to know their white administrator and could talk freely to him. Many abuses might thus be brought to

³⁶¹ Ibid: Letter to his mother, September 2, 1906.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, February 10, 1910

³⁶⁴ Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 12.

light, and the knowledge he acquired from these contacts with the ordinary men and women of the tribe was a useful background to his discussions with chiefs and elders.³⁶⁵

Likewise, John Brayne-Baker spent much of his near thirty-year tenure as a political officer wandering from one part of Nigeria to another. To say that the district officer's's sojourning was intense would be a bit of an understatement. Brayne-Baker's first division, Bamenda, was roughly the size of Wales! During his career as a servant of the government in Nigeria, A.C.G. Hastings claimed to have travelled more than 25,000 miles on horseback.³⁶⁶

As the district officer made his way from village to village the travel proved difficult, but so too did the living conditions. Together with the unending duties and treacherous touring, there also existed untold threats to a district officer's health. Malaria and other tropical diseases posed a near constant hazard; dangerous animals lurked in the bush; and run-ins with menacing criminals were common enough. During a four-year stint in Kigoma-Ujiji, Frank Longland knew personally two district officer'ss who were killed by elephants and another who died following an attack by a water buffalo.³⁶⁷ H.B. Hermon-Hodge, who assumed the pseudonym Langa Langa while working in Nigeria, claimed to have ingested 21,000 grains of quinine during his career in Africa.³⁶⁸ Quinine protected men from malaria, but it also increased the likelihood of contracting an affliction known as blackwater fever—a particularly nasty ailment causing the red blood cells to burst in the bloodstream, releasing hemoglobin directly into the blood vessels and the urine. The signs of blackwater fever typically included chills, jaundice, vomiting, and dark red or black colored urine.³⁶⁹ If possible, those infected with this affliction necessitated

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ A.C.G. Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 132.

³⁶⁷ RHO. Heussler Papers. "Responses to questions posed by Heussler to Frank Longland." April 27, 1961.

³⁶⁸ Langa, Langa, *Up Against it in Northern Nigeria*, 8.

³⁶⁹ Drake-Brockman, R. E. (1929). "Quinine and Blackwater Fever. *British Medical Journal*,

immediate evacuation and treatment. This was the story of C. Place and many others who had their careers cut short by spells of blackwater fever. Despite his constant pill-popping, Hermon-Hodge endured bouts of dysentery, typhoid, malaria, and liver abscesses at various times throughout his career. While only once was he invalided home, he recalled in his memoirs being “near death on more than one occasion.”³⁷⁰

These hazardous conditions, though tolerable enough to Hermon-Hodge, were more than some men could stomach. Nine of Frank Longland’s close acquaintances, including three district officers, committed suicide during his tenure in Tanganyika. In explaining his experiences to historian Robert Heussler following the conclusion of his career, W.R. Crocker made a point to ensure that Heussler was aware of the rough and tumble nature of the district officer’s service:

It is important for you to grasp this point about life in Africa in those days. I will mention a few examples. There were no refrigerators, so that food either came out of tins or was what one shot locally. There was little fruit excepting for a few weeks of the year, and although we made great efforts, we found it difficult to grow vegetables excepting for a few months. This meant that everyone was suffering more or less from chronic malnutrition. Then there was the climate. West Africa was particularly bad and we, of course, had no air conditioning and no fans; there was no electricity in out-stations (where junior officers spent most of their time). Junior officers, in addition, spent much of their time in any case touring, and so in living in tents or in grass and mud rest houses... Then there was the incidence of disease itself. We all took quinine every day against Malaria. That usually prevented Malaria but it made Blackwater Fever fatal in about 50 percent of men appointed to the West African Colonies...Finally there was the very important fact that most of the men were bachelors or "grass-widowers". Even those with wives were allowed to have them out for about only six months in an 18 months tour; and in those days European children were not allowed in West Africa at all.³⁷¹

Reminders of their own mortality were all around them. Noel Rowling, the wife of a district officer who served in Nigeria during the early 1930s recorded in her memoirs an incident

2(3593), 931–932.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 192-195.

³⁷¹ RHO. Heussler Papers, “Letter from W.R. Crocker.” August 16, 1960.

that she carried with her for years afterward. While visiting a small village, called Lang Lang, the local headman asked Noel and her husband if they would like to visit “the grave.” Unsure how to answer, Rowling’s husband responded bewilderingly, “what grave?”³⁷² With the motion of his hand the headman drew their attention to an unmarked tomb, which he informed them contained “one leg and a sandshoe of a district officer who had been murdered and eaten by cannibals in 1915.”³⁷³ Departing Lang Lang, Rowling and her husband next arrived at their district headquarters at Shendam where, much to their dismay, they found a gravesite located in the current district officer’s garden, which belonged to the former district officer who had been killed there a few years before.³⁷⁴ All of these conditions combined to put tremendous strains, physical and psychological, on the colonial civil servant. His job was neither for the faint of heart, nor for those unconvinced of Britain’s imperial mission.

Administrative officers sometimes traversed as many as sixteen to twenty miles in a single day while out on tour. The day usually began very early—often before sunrise—and would commence around mid-morning before the temperature (in the less temperate regions) became too oppressive.³⁷⁵ After a camp breakfast, the district officer then typically proceeded into the village and began his inspections. For the district officer, first impressions were absolutely essential. Touring villages and local hamlets gave the district officer time to “wander about informally and talk to locals.”³⁷⁶ John Carrow, an administrative officer who served in Africa for the better part of twenty years, said of these excursions:

I personally thought it was most important to try and make friends with the villagers (men, women, and children) and show them that the white man was human and not what

³⁷² Noel Rowling, *Nigerian Memories* (London: Merlin Books), 24.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ RHO. Heussler Papers. Box 6, File 1, Folio 12: “Notes again by John H. Carrow,” 1919-1939

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

would be called nowadays a 'Martian'. I was lucky because I enjoyed talking to the villagers.³⁷⁷

Of trekking, A.C.G. Hastings wrote of his time as a district officer in Nigeria:

It is the soul of life out there [in the Empire]. It makes for health and hardening, it gives us constant change of scene which is refreshing, and adds each day to our experience. More than that, it is the essence of our work in Nigeria. The closer personal touch with native life, the real acquaintance with native thought and feeling, is only got by moving constantly among the villages, and three months of travelling is worth a year of office work.³⁷⁸

It was while the district officer was on tour that he prepared local communities for the collection of taxes, estimated food supplies, ensured the presence of law and order, inspected schools, prisons, and hospitals, and generally gave any and all recommendations he deemed appropriate.

As in the bomas, one of the chief duties of the trekking district officer was to listen to complaints. As all political officers were also *ex-officio* magistrates, at each stop the district officer conducted numerous meetings with both chiefs and average villagers and held court on any variety of matters.³⁷⁹ Temple-Perkins remembered of his time on tour that:

every conceivable subject is discussed, from food planting to personal hygiene; from births, deaths and marriages to murder and divorce. Courts are held, appeals from Chiefs' Court are heard, and all manner of advice is...given.³⁸⁰

These barazas—formal meetings between the district officer and local communities—often served as the cornerstone of Britain's colonial government. Many of the larger local communities contained a public meetinghouse—the baraza hall—where all forms of local business were conducted. In British Africa, the baraza hall was typically an oblong building, surrounded by a

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ A.C.G. Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 153.

³⁷⁹ E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 60.

³⁸⁰ RHO. Memoirs of E.A. Temple-Perkins entitled, "Unadorned Career," 1925-1954, Mss. Afr. s. 1818, pages, 8-9.

shaded verandah.³⁸¹ It was here that the district officer met with local headmen, listened to grievances and, often, gave his orders. In Uganda, Eric Arnold Temple-Perkins remembered daily business in the baraza halls of his district this way

The district officer arrives, accompanied by the senior chief and his retinue. The chief's drummers at the entrance beat a rowdy welcome as the district officer approaches the hall and strides up the center aisle. Everybody stands, and words of welcome such as "*yoga*" or "*mirembe*" are exchanged. The district officer takes his seat on the dais which has on it a table and chairs and is carpeted with a native mat or leopard skin. The native police yell to the crowd to sit still and listen...The district officer mentions the subject which may occur to him as the result of something he has seen on his journey—anything topical—comments on the state of the buildings in the chief's HQ...public health...food...cattle...crime...marriage...dowries... Then follows a succession of individuals appearing separately before the dais [to voice their grievances].³⁸²

There was no end to the variety of cases and protestations brought before the district officer. In particular, district officer's used the occasion of their visit to the baraza halls as a means of trying local villagers charged with crimes against the government. These cases dealt with matters big and small. In July of 1933, for instance, the district officer of Badagri, Nigeria tried the case of man charged with over-loading his canoe with passengers as he transported them through the winding waterways that connected Lake Nokoue with Lagos Lagoon. Frequent accidents involving the over-crowding of vessels prompted the colonial government to pass an ordinance restricting the number of travelers who could occupy a canoe at any one time.³⁸³ After hearing the testimonies of the accused man and the arresting officer, the district officer found the former guilty. Before passing his sentence the district officer warned the man, "one of these days you will be capsized and drowned and then will not trouble me anymore."³⁸⁴ In a more serious incident in the spring of 1907, Selwyn Grier poured over the case of a young man who

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*. "A Case in Court", from a correspondent. July 5, 1933.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

reported that his village headman had stolen his wife, beat him with his fists, and assaulted him with an axe. According to Grier, this particular incident was “a bald account of a most heartbreaking story,” one so often heard in Africa.³⁸⁵

Beyond mere inspections, cases, conversations, and complaints, a district officer’s tour was also a means of demonstrating a show of British presence and, if necessary, force. district officer’s’s believed their tours to be an integral part of the maintenance of law and order, as well as British influence in the outlying regions of their districts. John Carrow referred to his initial meetings with villagers as “showing the flag,” a trick he noted that he picked up from his days in the Royal Navy.³⁸⁶ A “bit of ‘showing off’,” Carrow claimed, went a long way in ensuring that peace was maintained. Put another way, one district officer added, “the whole secret of success...out here is to let one’s imagination work and always to have an eye to effect—one can often affect more with a little blarney about a flag or staff than one can with a regiment of soldiers.”³⁸⁷ Another district officer who served in British Somaliland during the inter-war years admitted, “to run the place with such small resources required a mixture of firmness, sympathy, and sheer bluff.”³⁸⁸ He continued

it should be stated... that the Protectorate maintained a four-hundred strong Camel Corps...which could be called upon in an emergency. But every district officer regarded the use of the Camel Corps as an admission of failure on his part...But it was a potent force in the background.³⁸⁹

The barazas, in particular, represented ways in which district officers attempted to demonstrate the authority of the government. Political officers expected local chiefs and headmen to be in attendance regularly. As Temple-Perkins remembered, “continued absenteeism [on the part of

³⁸⁵ RHO. Grier Papers, Letter to his mother March 10, 1907.

³⁸⁶ RHO. Heussler Papers. Box 6, File 1, Folio 12: “Notes again by John H. Carrow,” 1919-1939

³⁸⁷ RHO. Grier Papers. “Letter to his sister.” April 15, 1909.

³⁸⁸ RHO. Heussler Papers. Box 1. File 1: “Notes from a D.O. in Somaliland.” 1960.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

African chiefs] is not to be countenanced as these barazas are in the nature of command performances.”³⁹⁰

Sheer bluff was exactly what Richard Oakley relied upon when visiting an outlying village in his district in Nigeria in 1921. While holding a baraza in a small hamlet attended by several dozen locals, Oakley was discussing the colonial government’s approach toward taxation to the village chief when, suddenly, a woman attending the meeting collapsed in what appeared to Oakley to be an epileptic seizure.³⁹¹ In his memoirs, Oakley remembered that this event triggered within him the temptation to panic. At once, there was a great deal of murmuring taking place in the crowd of onlookers. Immediately, Oakley recalled, “I felt it was up to me to do something.”³⁹² However, while he made sure to present an air of calm, Oakley could not help but feel apprehensive: “Memories of Rider Haggard’s yarns leapt to my mind, making me wonder whether it would be taken as a bad omen... perhaps they would think that I had cast a spell on her.”³⁹³ Having virtually no medical or experience or really any idea at all how to treat the patient, Oakley guessed—and he guessed with confidence:

Deliberately, I rose to my feet, feeling far from easy, and went over to her. I cleared a ring about her, and then tried to force her teeth open with the handle of my pen knife, but they were immovably clenched; so, not knowing what to do, I took her by the shoulders with both hands and bent her backwards and forwards from the hips, rhythmically, several times, then laid her gently down again. I calmly resumed my seat with all the appearance of absolute confidence in my treatment and proceeded with the argument.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ RHO. *Memoirs of E.A. Temple-Perkins*, 8-9.

³⁹¹ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 74.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

With luck on his side, Oakley noted that soon the woman came to and began to sit up and regain her normal faculties. In retrospect, Oakley noted that this “was much to my secret relief, for I was just beginning to think that I might have killed her!”³⁹⁵

This kind of schema was as much the case for India and Asia as it was for Africa, although the administration of India differed slightly in terms of organization from the territories under the dominion of the Colonial Office. The most significant divergence rested on the existence in India of a figure known as the Viceroy, the representative of the British monarchy in Britain’s most prized colonial possession. Below the Viceroy stood a coterie of administrators ranging from the Provincial Governors to the district officers who served at the local level. Although the district officer sometimes went by different titles on the Indian subcontinent—here the people sometimes referred to the district officer as the District Collector or District Magistrate—the scale of his responsibilities were equally as endless as they were in Africa. In the words of one British commentator in the eyes of the vast majority of the 200,000,000 Indians living under British rule:

He [the district officer] is their Government...If he can, he must be to them the nearest thing on earth to a peripatetic providence. All British India is divided into about 270 districts... The typical area [of an Indian district] covers several thousand square miles, and includes nearly a million souls. It is to a charge of this magnitude that our Officer, with a sparse staff, must address himself. He must know everything that really matters to general life within a thousand mud-built villages, or sometimes twice as many. He is concerned with weather, crops, boundaries, disease, debts, crime, factions, etiquette, jealousies, and ambitions. He wields large powers of patronage; he is responsible for making a vast number of minor appointments, for instance, of village headmen and accountants, of revenue officials and office clerks. He is not only arbiter formally, but adviser humanly. He must quell disturbances upon exceptional occasion, but usually his influence allays trouble before it comes to an outbreak. Amidst religious rivalries he is an invaluable neutral.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ *The Manchester Guardian*. J.L. Garvin, “Britain in India.” June 22, 1930. (page 14).

As in Africa and other parts of the Dependent Empire, the life of a district officer in India was likewise divided into two equally important halves: the district headquarters and touring the outlying regions. Typically, in most regions of India, Indian civil servants performed their work at headquarters during the summer months due to the extreme heat. Beginning in the winter months, though, the district officer “went to camp,” meaning he toured all over his district with a small mobile office as his ‘travelling headquarters’.³⁹⁷ While on tour he inspected the infrastructures and, as Collector, he “presided over a large revenue and land records establishment and devoted careful attention to the doings of officials responsible for the collection of revenue.”³⁹⁸

As a district officer stationed in the town of Henjada, located on Irrawaddy River at the top of the Burmese delta, Benjamin Herbert Heald dealt with everything from snakebites to land preservation.³⁹⁹ When he was not performing his administrative duties and meeting with local communities, Heald also acted as the custodian and caretaker of a local English church centered in Henjada. Here, it was Heald’s responsibility even to hold services whenever he was at headquarters and to officiate Christian marriages and burials.⁴⁰⁰ Another colonial civil servant in India likened the district officer in India to the Pooh-bah, popularized by the Gilbert and Sullivan character who found himself responsible for every conceivable task in the state.⁴⁰¹ A veteran of the Indian Civil Service, John Beames stated that the district officer in India was supposed to be very much what Joseph was in the Egyptian prison: “whatsoever was done therein, he was the

³⁹⁷ *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, 1929, 29.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ BLL. Papers of Benjamin Herbert Heald. Mss. Eur. D688, 1900-1910, pages 19-29.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj*, 91.

doer thereof.”⁴⁰² Ernest Edye spent the first two hours of every day, at a minimum, at his headquarters in Northern India interviewing visitors, listening to their troubles, and hearing their recommendations. Often, Edye greeted as many as forty visitors per day—a coterie that included everyone from businessmen, to landlords, to journalists, lawyers, government officials, soldiers, politicians, and peasantry.⁴⁰³ According to Edye, only this kind of accessibility made for a good government servant.⁴⁰⁴ Many others agreed. In an anonymously published editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* in November 1925, a political officer in the ICS stated plainly: “a very large part of the Englishman’s power for good in this country depends on his opportunities for casual intercourse with all sorts of conditions of men.”⁴⁰⁵ The contributor to the paper explained that it was not uncommon for the district officer to receive as many as one hundred people a day. Some came with complaints, some with wants, and many just came for a chat.⁴⁰⁶

Thus, in both Africa and India, one of the district officer’s primary functions was to keep in contact with a wide variety of people. It was largely through this kind of direct contact that the district officer kept in touch with the life and thoughts of those in his district. For many in administrative circles, such close relations could make all the difference times of trouble. In the minds of colonial bureaucrats, open communication of this sort might mean the difference

⁴⁰² John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, 156-7.

⁴⁰³ BLL. Papers of Ernest Henry Huish Edye. Mss. Eur. Photo. Eur. 293. Excerpts from a Memoir entitled, *What about India?* 1930.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, “Housekeeping in India,” November 21, 1925, page 10. It was not uncommon for district officers to chime in on colonial administrative matters in official publications, like the *Guardian*. However, active imperial civil servants were legally prohibited from voicing their opinions about colonial administration. Thus, it is fairly typical that an editorial piece like this one would be written anonymously.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

between the survival of a district or its falling to pieces.⁴⁰⁷ And there was no end to the work, nor to the worry. Kenneth Bradley explained in his diaries during his service in Nigeria,

This season's camber is next year's ditch. This year's forest is next year's fire. This year's planting is next year's bread—or famine. So much of one's time is given up to intangibles, things like personal relationships with chiefs, or the endless expenditure of breath. The tangibles—things like bricks and mortar are all that there ever is to show—and yet even with them, in Africa, how quickly the jungle is let in!⁴⁰⁸

What is more, district officers from Lagos to Calcutta could generally expect the onus of their incalculable obligations to fall squarely on their shoulders with only minimal assistance from the outside. From the moment the young district officer arrived in his respective colony, he learned that he could expect to be on his own and that, very often, it would be left up to him to singlehandedly decipher the many nuances of a life in the Empire. Preliminary training for district officers bound for the Colonies was sparse in the decades before the 1930s. One might expect to receive a briefing on such topics as tropical hygiene, the colonial system of accounts, phonetics, and the like, but ultimately, 'hands on' learning was the name of the game for the colonial service recruit.⁴⁰⁹ According to most established district officers, though, this was precisely how they preferred things and they deemed this inherent lack of training to be only natural considering the cultural emphasis on philistinism they experienced in their youth, and the endless variety of work a district officer would be expected to perform. In the words of one civil servant: "the only way to train a man [for the colonial services] is to give him the work to do and tell him to get on with it. His mistakes will teach him. He would have made mistakes anyway, even with training. Training only fills the head with harmful preconceived notions."⁴¹⁰ In agreement, another former Colonial Office recruit posted to Ceylon in 1914, John Strong, wrote

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Kenneth Bradley, *Diary of a District Officer*, 177-78.

⁴⁰⁹ RHO. GB 0162 Mss.Afr.1881. A.F.B. Bridges, *So we used to Do*, 10-13.

⁴¹⁰ RHO. Heussler Papers: "Notes from A.N. Armstrong, June 4, 1960.

in hindsight: “We never had any training in anthropology nor imbibed any *a priori* principles of administration, and my private view is that the latter generation, who went through such courses of instruction, would have been as well off without them.”⁴¹¹

On acceptance into the colonial services, the young district officer was appointed to a particular colony with the rank of cadet.⁴¹² Generally after serving a probationary period the cadet, if deemed satisfactory, was then promoted to the rank of assistant district officer. A common scene prevalent in writings and reminiscences of countless cadets—especially in Africa—was one of the helpless and confused greenhorn, stepping off a steamship in some foreign colonial port city with absolutely no idea where his superiors were stationed, how to reach them, or where to gather the necessary resources for his first tour of duty. This was certainly the story of Frank Hives. Little more than a fortnight after departing from the cold and crowded port city of Liverpool, Hives, a newly minted cadet, disembarked the steam liner, *Sokoto*, shortly after noon on a hot and dusty day at the southern Nigerian port city of Old Calabar. Just a month before, Hives’ only knowledge of West Africa had been limited to an assortment of facts and pictures he had located in an outdated atlas and a handful of books he acquired from his local library. Following his appointment to the Nigerian civil service, the Colonial Office’s assistance had been minimal, at best. Other than his instructions to sail for Old Calabar, Hives’ only other support from the government came in the form of a neatly packed parcel containing one hundred quinine tablets with the directive that he should take one pill per day after his steamer made its way south of Sierra Leone.⁴¹³ Once setting sail for Africa, Hives found that he was one of the few “new chums” on board and, naturally, he began asking

⁴¹¹ RHO. Heussler Papers: “Letter from John Strong, September 9, 1960.

⁴¹² E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 10.

⁴¹³ Frank Hives, *Juju and Justice in Nigeria*, 9-10.

questions about life in Africa to veteran officials of the service who were making their return journey to the ‘Dark Continent’. Regarding his conversations, though, Hives admitted that the talk was “mostly about subjects familiar enough to...experienced people, but double Dutch to me.”⁴¹⁴ When the discussions were not going over his head, Hives’ new friends told many jokes at his expense. Hives remembered, these “old stagers” attempted to frighten “me with harrowing tales of what happened to most men who went out to the ‘White man’s grave’, or entered the ‘Bight of Benin’.”⁴¹⁵

Conditions improved only little for Hives when he made landfall at Old Calabar. As the *Sokoto* made port, he found that no one from the government was there to meet him, nor had the Colonial Office given him any specific instructions as to what he should do once he arrived. When he wandered off the boat, he could not help but acknowledge the nagging sense of loneliness that gripped him. On the verge of outright despair, Hives did the only thing he could think to do: hesitantly, he made his way ashore and headed toward the nearest saloon to drown his sorrows and plan his next move.⁴¹⁶ Much to his relief and as luck would have it, just as he ordered his first drink he heard a man’s voice coming from outside the tavern enquiring into the whereabouts of his new assistant district officer.⁴¹⁷ At last, Hives thought, he was rescued. Yet, this momentary feeling of optimism at his first bit of good luck since arriving was quickly shattered when the stranger greeted him with a sharp reprimand: “may I ask who you are, and what you are to cause me to be deprived of my Saturday afternoon’s sleep? Why have I to come

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, 10.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid; This theme of teasing the greenhorn is also discussed in Anthony Kirk-Greene’s *Symbol Of Authority*, 62. Kirk-Greene demonstrates that a young cadet’s first voyage out to Africa often imposed “a long lasting impression of what life was going to be like” in the Empire.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 11.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

and meet you in this heat?” his caller demanded.⁴¹⁸ After a brief explanation, Hives offered to buy his new companion a cold lager for his troubles—it was only then that he began to get a few answers to his questions.

Following a bit of casual conversation, Hives’ new friend escorted him to Government House and introduced him to the Acting High Commissioner [H.C.], Sir Walter Egerton. Egerton informed Hives that he would be posted as an assistant to the district officer in the division of Bende, located approximately one hundred and fifty miles inland from Old Calabar.⁴¹⁹ From here, Hives remembered of his encounter with the High Commissioner:

Then I enquired where Bende was situated, and how I was to get there...He got a little flustered at this, but at length replied that I would have to proceed from Itu to a place called Afikpo, some sixty miles farther up the river, and thence trek overland for two days. The directions he gave me were very hazy, as he did not say how I was to get up river from Itu. I guessed rightly that he had never been to Bende himself, and determined to find out from someone who had more knowledge of that part of the country.⁴²⁰

Two days later, after gathering supplies and the staff of attendants recommended to him by the H.C., Hives put Old Calabar at his back and marched into the unknown. In the short order of hardly more than six week’s time, Hives went from having virtually no perception whatsoever of where Nigeria was located on the map, to trekking hundreds of miles into foreign territory with limited experience and the most nebulous of directions.

Still yet, Hives found only minimal reprieve once he arrived in Bende, some two weeks later. Just as in Old Calabar, he received no formal greeting when he finally reached the district station and, moreover, he learned that his supervisor was not there at all—the latter was out on tour and no one seemed to know precisely when he would return. To make matters quite a bit

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 12-13.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 13.

more distressing, one of the locals also informed Hives that the only other European official on the station was “dying of fever in his bungalow.”⁴²¹ Hives later recalled:

This, I thought, was a very sorry welcome to my new station, and I wended my way across to the bungalow [where the European officer was located]...I told a boy to show me the place, and followed him upstairs, where, stretched upon a camp bed in an almost unfurnished room, was a young man, evidently in the grip of a very bad ‘go’ of malarial fever. He was conscious, and when I told him who I was he just said: ‘Thank God, now I can get away from this accursed country—never to return to it.’⁴²²

Other than his stricken colleague and a handful of native servants, Hives remained alone at the station’s headquarters for the next week until the acting district officer finally returned from his trek.⁴²³ Hives found his new boss to be “an exceedingly nice fellow” and “very helpful to me while I was learning my duties.” Soon enough, though, Hives also discovered that his new chief was very, very sick.⁴²⁴ As his district officer’s condition grew worse over the next few days, Hives reasoned that the only sensible course of action was to send him to the coast at Old Calabar as quickly as possible: “So I arranged for a hammock and relays of carriers, together with an escort, to get him to Aro-Chuku beach, thence down the river in a launch.”⁴²⁵ Despite Hives’ best efforts, the district officer died only a few days later. Nearly as shocking as the death of his first chief, though, was the news Hives received a few days later from the provincial headquarters, naming *him* the new head of the district!⁴²⁶

In sum, Frank Hives learned much about the Empire, and his role in it, in only a span of about two months. His early experiences taught him that, in the Empire, one had no choice but to be self-reliant, inquisitive, and assertive. From the moment he had made landfall in Old

⁴²¹ Ibid, 18-19.

⁴²² Ibid, 19.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 20.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

Calabar, Hives faced one challenge after another with virtually no assistance from anyone. The Acting High Commissioner was somewhat supportive but, in Hives' own estimation, the 'great man' seemed out of touch. The H.C. was comfortable handing out orders and passing on instructions, but when it came to practical advice or knowledge of the colony, Hives found him clearly lacking. In the short period of time he had been in Africa, the only person to truly provide sound advice was a fellow district officer with whom he had only spent a few nights.⁴²⁷ Moreover, Hives discovered that things could be equally as complicated in the districts as they were on the coast. He had no time to 'learn' his new job; instead, he was immediately thrust into a position of influence and decision-making. Within two weeks of his arrival in Bende, he made life or death decisions; in just short of a month he was the man in charge.

It would be tempting to dismiss Hives' saga as an extraordinary exception if not for the fact that innumerable other young and inexperienced cadets and assistant district officers shared very similar experiences upon their arrival in the Empire. Like Hives, many new cadets could not escape feelings of uncertainty at what lay ahead. When he first arrived in Tanganyika in 1929, L.M. Heaney found himself thinking back to his days as a young man at public school. He wrote to his mother shortly after landing in Africa that he felt "rather like a new boy at school, having to take my hands out of my pockets when I speak to a prefect, having to go down to the tennis courts when I would rather read, because I know the Provincial Commissioner wants a game."⁴²⁸ Alan Burns arrived in Nigeria as a novice servant of the government only to find that no one was there to meet him or provide him with his marching orders. Burns remembered conceding on his very first night in Africa that there was nothing left for him to do but wander

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ RHO. Papers of L.M. Heaney. Mss.Afr.s.2271. Box 1. "Letter to his mother and father." October 13, 1929.

around the wharf in the dark until he bumped into someone who could point him in the direction of Government House.⁴²⁹ Assigned to the Cameroons in 1928, John Brayne Baker arrived at the port of Victoria where his superiors informed him that his first posting was to be in the district of Bamenda. The “immediate problem,” Brayne Baker later recalled, “was how to get there...there were few roads in the Cameroons...and I was told I must walk most of the way.”⁴³⁰ Shortly after disembarking, a stranger barked at Anthony Sillery, “So you’re just coming out? Well, don’t forget I told you, it’s not too late to turn back.”⁴³¹ In India, when Samuel Green reached his destination in Hyderabad to take up a position in the Indian Civil Service in January 1919 he wrote to his mother, “I am in a curious position at present...everything is rather vague and I [have not] gathered much, except that one has little to rely on except one’s own discretion!”⁴³² Another Nigerian district officer, E.F.G. Haig, admitted, “Nobody ever knows anything in this country...the only thing [to do] is to find out on your own and push yourself where you want to go...”⁴³³ When one of Haig’s colleague’s arrived at his first posting, his predecessor informed him: “there are only two white men in this station—one’s buried dead and the other buried alive.”⁴³⁴ Any intimation a rookie district officer might have had when setting sail from England that the Empire would merely be a place of good sport, recreation, and amusement quickly came crashing down. As for those, though, who came looking for responsibility and for adventure, there was certainly no shortage of that.

⁴²⁹ Sir Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 30.

⁴³⁰ RHO. Papers of John Brayne Baker. Mss.Afr.s.1926. “Talk given by Brayne Baker depicting his service in the British Cameroons from 1928 to 1956.”

⁴³¹ RHO. A. Sillery, “Working Backwards” Mss. Afr.r.207, 42 as quoted in Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 63.

⁴³² BLL. “Letters home from Samuel Green, ICS” Mss. Eur.310/3, 1919-1920. Letter to his mother, January 20, 1919; Also see, letter to his sister, January 28, 1919.

⁴³³ E.F.G. Haig, *Nigerian Sketches*, 13.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

The immediate lack of support and guidance Hives and others received upon landing in the Empire stood as a stark, if sometimes humorous, bit of foreshadowing of what lay ahead. Within days of arrival, newcomers endured a proverbial trial by fire. Generally, like Hives, first tour cadets and assistant district officers were completely ignorant of their colony, its people and its geography.⁴³⁵ Their most significant source of guidance came from their first district officer. As a recent arrival to the Cameroons John Brayne-Baker explained that one evening's visit with his district officer taught him more about the Empire and colonial administration than he had learned in the previous six months he spent in England at the employ of the Colonial Office.⁴³⁶ At his first station in Bamenda, the acting district officer wasted no time initiating Brayne-Baker into his duties. In Nigeria, A.C.G. Hastings remembered that the most influential figure in his career was his first district officer, under whom he served in Lokja.⁴³⁷

Brayne-Baker's first days at the divisional headquarters began innocently enough. As a new arrival on the station, Brayne-Baker assumed responsibility for the most basic of tasks. His chief assigned him to the district Treasury and the local prison, where he collected revenue, paid the wages of the native staff, and inspected the conditions of the local gaol to ensure prisoners received their rations.⁴³⁸ Yet, just ten days following his arrival, the district officer at Bamenda announced that he was going on tour for as many as three weeks, and would be leaving behind a very green Brayne-Baker to run the station on his own. As he departed, the district officer informed Brayne-Baker that "as he would be travelling for some distance it would probably take a week to get a reply to any questions" and, thus, it would be up to him to "make decisions, right

⁴³⁵ E.F.G. Haig, *Nigerian Sketches*, 13; A.C.G. Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 17;

⁴³⁶ RHO. Memoirs and talks of John Brayne-Baker. "Talk presented to the Probus Club. GB 0162 Mss.Afr.s.1926. 1952, pages 3-4

⁴³⁷ Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 35.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

or wrong.”⁴³⁹ Once Brayne-Baker took over for his district officer, he noted “there was plenty to worry me,” but “one learnt as one went along.”⁴⁴⁰

The same sequence of events unfolded for C.N. Lawrence in Northern Rhodesia. When Lawrence arrived at his first district as a young cadet, his District Commissioner notified him that he would soon be taking responsibility for the largest tribe in the territory with no time for significant training or instruction. Understandably concerned, Lawrence asked the D.C. “what the job involved.” The response Lawrence received was at once distressingly vague and also more than a little shocking: “you’ll soon find out.”⁴⁴¹ In countless other scenarios just like these, district officers found themselves thrown into the fire with virtually no preparation. What is seemingly most remarkable about this fact, though, was the degree to which most of these young cadets accepted their new positions and duties. Once Lawrence assumed control over his new division as a young cadet, he soon reported that he felt he was “quite at home and able to run the place.”⁴⁴² Many others shared the same convictions. As a young administrative officer who took control of his first district in Katura, Nigeria in 1909, Hugh Middleton Brice-Smith explained in a letter home to his parents: “I feel like Pooh Bah Lord High Everything Else...I welcome it as giving me splendid experience.”⁴⁴³ In India, Frank Bayne reportedly, “never doubted that he knew what to do, better than anyone around him.”⁴⁴⁴

Judging from this sampling of accounts, it is no wonder that Ralph Furse and his supporters took such pains to attract the philistine. Further, it is also more understandable why

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss.Brit.Emp.s.480. Fox 1, File 3 “Talk with C.N. Lawrence, Government of Northern Rhodesia, Lusaka.” February 13, 1960, page 10.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ RHO. Mss.Afr.s.1845. Hugh Middleton Brice-Smith, “Letter home from Nigeria.” March 25, 1909.

⁴⁴⁴ Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service*, 41.

the public schools were the chief sources for the colonial civil services because of the emphasis they placed on creating the well-rounded gentleman. One practically had no choice but to have confidence in his abilities or to be able to consider himself ‘well-rounded’ if he were to fulfill the endless responsibilities assigned to him as a political officer in the Empire. The public school values of determination, independence, and self-reliance, so deeply imbedded in young men of the Victorian generation were absolutely integral in shaping the worldview of those who set out for administrative posts in the Empire. Without a firm conviction that they held these attributes, it would be hard to imagine that any district officer might have endured more than a few days or weeks on the job. As Edward Thring intimated of the purpose of British elitist education:

They [school boys] come [to school] to be taught how to live, to be prepared to meet the trials of life, to find out that as they must some day act alone on their own responsibility, it is well to begin to know how to do so. The preparation then is a preparation for the general habits of life hereafter.⁴⁴⁵

For the district officer, his arrival in the Empire signified the beginnings of what Thring described as the “hereafter.” Their first days in the colonies marked the inception of everything they had been preparing for their entire lives—and they were aware of it. Kenneth Bradley explained of his own experiences as a public school alumnus who set sail for the unknown of the Empire, “our minds [as public school boys], within the somewhat narrow, self-imposed limits, were being trained as useful, if inelegant, maids of all work.”⁴⁴⁶ For Bradley, the effects of public school life were enormous for his own experiences with imperial administration:

They [public schools] succeeded in equipping England with several generations of men who, if no cleverer than the general run of people, were fortified by the moral certainties of the ‘code’ and an easy assumption of authority. Many of them thought of their lives in terms of service and a pension rather than of profit... With all their shortcomings they served us well... The aim of all liberal education... is essentially the same, to produce

⁴⁴⁵ Thring, *Education and School*, 148.

⁴⁴⁶ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 23.

what Confucius called ‘the superior man’, who ‘bends like bamboo before necessity, but does not break, adapting himself to society but keeping his integrity.’⁴⁴⁷

As a consequence of their upbringing, most young cadets and district officers were quite at home in an atmosphere that, to most, would have seemed intensely disorienting. Whether or not they were truly ‘prepared’ in some technocratic sense of the word mattered little to them. Even with virtually no foreknowledge of Africa, India, Asia, or the people who lived there, young cadets often believed they could handle whatever came to them because they saw themselves as having been engrained with the qualities of leadership. The culture to which these men belonged created an expectation for leading a life of responsibility.

In combination, their background, along with the unique conditions they found in the Empire, caused colonial civil servants to view themselves (and their duties) in a very particular light. First and foremost, the district officer arrived in the Empire with an extremely well defined sense of paternalism. Charles Jeffries wrote of his experiences in working with Ralph Furse in the selection of candidates for the colonial services: “Furse wanted public school men,” because “public school men had experienced the prefect system of training and were thus fitted for trusteeship work, for being the mother and father of their people. A paternalistic form of government in the colonies,” he continued, “could have no better men.”⁴⁴⁸ For aspiring imperial servants, the Empire represented a unique opportunity to act out their desire for positions of leadership. So, upon their arrival to their colonies, cadets were generally eager to begin their work immediately. Kenneth Bradley summed these sentiments up well when he wrote in his memoirs

Above all, we were supposed to be dispassionate and just to try to win the trust, if not always the affection, of the people. We would have said then that it was the public

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁴⁸ RHO. Heussler Papers. Notes from Sir Charles Jeffries. June 22, 1960.

school code in action. We had not yet learned to apologize for it either to the Africans or to our fellow Englishmen. This attitude was typical of British administrators throughout the Empire, and it was probably one of the most important factors.⁴⁴⁹

District officers like Bradley thought of their role as being akin to that of a prefect or head boy, welcoming a new crop of young, inexperienced boys onto the school grounds. Their past experiences, their training, and their knowledge of procedure, they felt, equipped them with a natural ability to lead.

Beyond their paternalistic instincts, district officers also came to define themselves through the nature of their work. The district officer emblazoned himself as ‘the man who could get things done’. If it needed building, he built it; if it needed growing, he grew it; if a tiger, wolf, leopard, or hyena harassed a local village, he sorted it out; if a fugitive was on the loose, the district officer went ‘man hunting’.⁴⁵⁰ These assorted tasks—and countless others—made up the administrative officer’s job description but, even further, they defined the district officer’s own conception of his place in the Empire. For A.C.G. Hastings:

The first years [on the job] were fascinating in their freedom, their chances of initiative, and in the necessity of self-reliance. The jobs to do were legion, mostly new, and there were few to ask advice of [*sic*]. One’s Chief had more than enough to do to spend time in answering plaintive questions, every one was doing five men’s work, and nobody had time to waste...Common sense was the chief asset in those days.⁴⁵¹

In India, William Lee-Warner of the Indian Civil Service wrote in 1901:

Despite telegraphs and steam, the Indian civilian must act on his own responsibility. At any moment religious differences and caste prejudices may raise a storm. From time to time large bodies of dacoits have to be suppressed, a troublesome man-eater must be shot, and an army of locusts destroyed. The signs of approaching famine have to be discerned, and even a few inches fall and the floods of the Indus may spread havoc. The I.C.S. is only one of many agencies...But upon its shoulders rest the very safety and welfare of 282 millions of the King’s subjects. The British character is developed by responsibility,

⁴⁴⁹ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 46.

⁴⁵⁰ Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste*, 94; RHO. Papers of Selwyn Grier. “Letter to his mother, Grace” 19 January, 1911.

⁴⁵¹ Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 239-40.

and by the feeling that one is placed in the fighting line. The interest and variety of his duties must fill the life of every member of the small regiment which constitutes the C.S. of India. He knows better than his critics his own shortcomings, and the vast field in which he has to play a part worthy of his country and of the traditions of his service. He is content if he can retire from it with an honest conviction that he ‘tried to do his duty’.⁴⁵²

District officers heaped upon themselves enormous responsibility. Lee-Warner emphasizes here his belief that the fate of 282 million people rested on *his* shoulders, and the shoulders of men who shared his occupation. Although he viewed it as intensely burdensome, it was the life he wanted for himself—an onus he was willing to bear. As a group, colonial civil servants considered it their job to ensure the survival of the Empire and the proliferation of the imperial mission. General policy may have originated from above, but it ended up in their hands.⁴⁵³

Another political officer, Theodore Williams, challenged the notion that the district officer was merely “a cog in the wheel;” instead he offered, “one is not the cog, but the wheel itself.”⁴⁵⁴

Going even further, Williams recorded in his diary his belief that his role in the Empire was one of “a prodigiously effective agent and lively creator for so long as one remains young enough and strong enough to bear the battle.”⁴⁵⁵ Charles Orr wrote to a companion in 1906, describing the immense responsibility he felt as an administrative officer:

...one has the constant never ceasing pressure of an enormous weight of responsibility and hard work—the responsibility vastly increased by the fact that one has no precedent to judge one through the maze of daily recurring difficulties. A new country has been opened by Europeans. Its conditions are strange and new. It is imperative that all one's acts and orders should be promptly given without hesitation or delay and as promptly carried out; yet the consequence of a mistake may be momentous. To continue a mistaken policy may mean dangerous discontent or a permanent blot on our administration; to abandon it must mean a loss of prestige more or less serious.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵² William Lee-Warner, KCSI, “The Indian Civil Service” in *The Cornhill Magazine* 11.63 (September, 1901), 325.

⁴⁵³ RHO. Papers and diaries of Theodore R. Williams. Mss.Afr.s.776.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ BLL. Charles Orr Papers. “Letter to Miss Levisieur.” May 27, 1906.

Just as their schoolmasters had told them, the district officer believed that he must strive to be “an all around man.”

In unison, the public school ethos and shared experiences in the Empire contributed to the development of an unshakeable *esprit de corps* within the Colonial Services. Only fellow servants of the imperial government subject to the same harsh conditions and challenges of administration could truly understand the realities of life in the Colonies. After just a short period in the Empire, many district officers and A.D.O.s found that they could only relate to those who shared their same experiences—first of the prefectorial hierarchy and then in the lonely outstations of the Empire. ACG Hastings called this sort of understanding “talking shop.” According to Hastings, “*esprit de corps* and keenness are our great assets out there [in the districts]. There is a thing called ‘shop’, the earnest discussion of local work. It is talked by most of us...and would bore outsiders to distraction.”⁴⁵⁷ Historian Benedict Anderson has argued that the effect of their past experiences were akin to those of soldiers in World War I. Only men who had served in the trenches could truly understand what conditions were like. In Anderson’s words, “the experience at once bonded them and cut them off from the bulk of society at home.”⁴⁵⁸ Only, as will be argued in the next section, these shared experiences did not simply separate the district officer ideologically from Britons still living on the Isles, it also placed a remarkable divide between political officers and their counterparts in Government House and Whitehall. Regardless of whether or not they had actually met in person, many district officers felt a sense of companionship with their fellow officers—most often they shared the same backgrounds, held the same values, and became bound by their commitment to the

⁴⁵⁷ Hastings, 240.

⁴⁵⁸ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, 42.

mission of the British Empire.⁴⁵⁹ Writing of this relationship, one Old Etonian explained what it was like to be introduced to a fellow public school product, “you know exactly the kind of man to whom you are going to be introduced...you know beforehand the precise point of view that he will take upon every conceivable topic, and the channels in which is conversation is certain to flow.”⁴⁶⁰ First they had lived amongst one another in the dormitories of Eton, Harrow, Oxford, Cambridge, and the like, now they rubbed shoulders in the Colonies. The effect for the Empire, as will be seen in the next section, was remarkable uniformity in outlook and action.

⁴⁵⁹ John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, 125; Patrick McDevit, *May the Best Man Win: Sport, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935*, 10; BLL. Ernest Henry Huish Edye, *What about India?* ”,

⁴⁶⁰ Quoted in Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 58.

“Seven Days from my Chief”

As a district officer serving in Northern Nigeria, Selwyn Grier’s values and principles were in many ways typical of the model colonial civil servant of the British Empire. Born the son of an English vicar to Hednesford in 1878, Grier completed his public school education at Marlborough College before enrolling at Pembroke College, Cambridge shortly after his eighteenth birthday. Following the completion of his degree in the Classics at Cambridge where he earned a 2nd class tripos, Grier served two short stints as a schoolmaster at Berkhamsted School (1901-1902) and Cheam School (1902-1905), before joining the Nigerian Civil Services in 1906.⁴⁶¹ Subsequently, the Colonial Office assigned Grier to Zaria Province, a large division located some one hundred and seventy miles north of the current capital city of Abjua. Although he surely didn’t know it upon arrival, Grier was destined to spend more than two decades in Africa only to become one of the most influential administrators in Britain’s colonial governance of Northern Nigeria. In fact, Grier was one of the rare few district officers to achieve at least the modest recognition of his superiors. Upon Grier’s retirement, Frederick Lugard credited him as “one of the comparatively small group who created the administration in Nigeria.”⁴⁶²

Grier arrived in Africa with the archetypical public school boy attitude. Upon settling in to his new duties just over a year after first setting foot in Nigeria, Grier wrote home to his mother explaining his ultimate reasoning for departing Britain for the Empire: “No one,” he wrote, “is able to work hard without enthusiasm and till I came out here I never found anything

⁴⁶¹ Edmund M. Hogan, *Berengario Cermenati Among the Igbirra (Ebira) of Nigeria: A Study in Colonial, Missionary, and Local Politics, 1897-1925*. (Ibadan: HEBN Publishers, 2011), 239. *Time Magazine*, “St. Vincent: Marine Job.” November 4, 1935.

⁴⁶² *London Times*, “Obituary: Sir Selwyn Grier—Service in Nigeria and the Windward Islands”. November 9, 1946.

which really inspired enthusiasm.”⁴⁶³ Grier went on to explain that teaching, his first career after leaving school, left him with a feeling of “utter blankness.”⁴⁶⁴ He continued:

All through life I have had a rooted objection to any form of exertion merely for the sake of exertion—i.e. without a definite object...But here [in the Empire]...one is trying to do one’s best for a primitive and in some cases degraded people—perhaps one is mistaken in what one does (according to some people...we are degrading and debasing the black man for our own selfish ends) but after all the object that one has always before one is an inspiring one [*sic*], and immediately the work that one does becomes of such absorbing interest that one never feels the strain. Excuse this rigmarole—I am afraid it may seem great nonsense, but it is what I feel myself.⁴⁶⁵

As a young man fresh out of school, Grier found no peace in life when he felt that he did not have a worthy purpose. “What good is it,” he asked, “to be able to write Greek prose better than one’s neighbors!”⁴⁶⁶ Far more important than grammar was the message that the Greek instilled: service for service’s sake. These lessons taught Grier the importance of doing “more than is sufficient to obtain one’s immediate object.”⁴⁶⁷ Although it may not be possible to fully ascertain Grier’s precise motives for joining the colonial service, it is evident from the above that Grier did not find his true vocational calling until he made his way into the Empire because it was only there that he found the purpose for which he had been longing. Clearly, Grier’s early experiences taught him the importance of performing what he deemed to be *meaningful* service. It is also reasonable to deduce, therefore, that Grier had an inherent desire to identify an occupation worthy of the training and tutelage he attained during his youth. The romantic, idealistic moralism ingrained within him during his school days was rarely far from his mind. In July of 1911, Grier wrote to his sister:

⁴⁶³ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his mother, December 23, 1907.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

it is only in after life that one does realize the advantages of the varsity out here, where one has the broadest outlook who is nil bound up in his own miserable department, who refuses to be tied up hand and foot in red tape, who can look at questions from different points of view. [This] is the 'varsity' man every time.⁴⁶⁸

As Grier wrote, "some" argued that the Empire was inherently exploitative; but to him this could not have been farther from the truth. Grier's example acts as a living, breathing demonstration that many colonial civil servants were deeply impacted by the lessons instilled in them at their public schools and elite universities.

Additionally, the worldview Grier brought with him to the Empire also perfectly reflects the public school ethos. Shortly before he sent the above message to his mother, Grier wrote his sister lamenting, as he saw it, the devolving character of Englishmen, whom he feared were losing their traditionally-held values:

It is a sign of the times that the English, a sporting race, which formerly were keen on every form of athletics, have now degraded athletics by professionalism, and the average man, whose forefathers were keen on athletics for the good it did them, is now content to sit and watch a sort of gladiatorial exhibition by paid professionals (I am thinking of modern football). Look at the attitude of the nation with regard to military training! Can you see no likeness to the state of Rome before its fall? The whole spirit of the English people seems to me to becoming more debased and rotten everyday. Excuse this long tirade, but I loathe the spirit of the present day, specifically, I am sorry to say that of the Little England Party.⁴⁶⁹

Grier clearly held in high esteem the public school emphasis on the games ethic and its ability to craft gentlemanly virtues; but, even more than that, Grier valued athletic competition for its accentuation of amateurism and philistinism. He believed, just as his Victorian educators had insisted, that sports bred 'gentle-manliness' and, in turn, these gentlemanly qualities made one fit to rule. For Grier virtue and bravery, not brains, made an effective administrator. In another letter home to his sister in April of 1909, Grier asked rhetorically, "do you really imagine that

⁴⁶⁸ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to Dorothy. July 29, 1911.

⁴⁶⁹ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to Dorothy. August 10, 1907.

fitness to rule is a matter of scholarship or that a sound judgment on imperial affairs is attained by the study of philosophy? Take the few statesmen that have been noted scholars: [William] Gladstone, [Augustine] Birrell, [and] [Aurthur] Balfour—to me they are the types of what we want to avoid—scholars and not men.”⁴⁷⁰ Grier exuberantly demonstrated a reverence for the core tenants of Victorian public school and Oxbridge education—character, service-mindedness, manliness, and a disdain for pure intellectualism; and it was with this distinctive mindset that Grier began his career. Grier was often quick to point out, “all our leading men in this job [imperial service] are Cambridge men.”⁴⁷¹ In his opinion, his fellow alumni didn’t merely “pose”, but were fully capable of carrying out “the real practical work, with a proper appreciation of the importance of detail.”⁴⁷²

Not only had Grier come to acknowledge, as a young man, that life without a worthy and ambitious purpose was empty, but he also contended that, whatever the job before him, he was destined to lead. Far from mere “posing,” most district officers like Grier proved to be men of action, ambition, and individualism. Not only was there typically no time nor the means of frequent communication with superiors, there was also little to no desire on the part of the district officer to unnecessarily keep their bosses informed of the goings on in their districts. Grier’s own self-proclaimed motto was, “if the man on the spot doesn’t know best, then send someone who does.”⁴⁷³ In the same vein, he wrote to his sister in 1910, that an effectively run empire was one in which “the man on the spot is allowed to make up his mind and act at once.”⁴⁷⁴ The best supervisors were those who realized this fact, embraced it, and supported it.

⁴⁷⁰ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, April 1909.

⁴⁷¹ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his sister, April 28, 1911.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, August 1, 1908.

⁴⁷⁴ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, January 31, 1910.

Perhaps equally as telling, in December 1916 he wrote his sister describing the effects of a government that ignored their administrative agents in the field:

The Government of this country is at last reaping what it has sown. For years now they have played the fool and shown the most futile weakness in dealing with... seditious agitation... I can only hope that at last our fatuous [headquarters] has learnt the lesson, i.e. that the man on the spot is the proper person to give them advice and that it would pay them to occasionally take it.⁴⁷⁵

From the beginning of his career to the end, Grier made plain that the district officer, the literal ‘man on the spot’, was the only true authority that could be trusted to administer the Empire responsibly.

What is more, administrative officers, like Grier, were quick to take advantage of opportunities for individual action—and they had an abundance of them. For starters, sheer isolation ensured that district officers achieved the opportunities for uninterrupted leadership to which they aspired. Often hundreds or even thousands of miles away from any central authority figure, the district officer had tremendous freedom of action. Almost without exception, there was little to no time for him to be able to wait for a cable of approval from Government House before making a decision. Particularly, in the more isolated, “one man stations,” where the district officer was the only administrative officer in the division, he might literally go months without direct contact with a superior. In Grier’s own experience, little existed that might interfere with his hopes of implementing his own ambitious schemes into his division. Just over a year into his tenure in Northern Nigeria, Grier wrote home to his mother:

Dorothy wrote of someone who lectured and said that as this [Northern Nigeria] was a protectorate it was not rightly a possession. People always like playing about with words and their meanings, but if he [the lecturer] had known anything about it, whether it is rightly a possession or not, our power here is I should imagine infinitely more autocratic than anywhere else. One can’t help feeling that [sentiment] in work such as I am doing now, with power to give practically any order, and the power to enforce it—7 days from

⁴⁷⁵ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to Dorothy, December 14, 1916.

my chief with no [wireless communication] to bother me. Consequently I have to do everything really without consulting my chief, and merely report to him after the event; being a good fellow he invariably backs one up as far as he can.⁴⁷⁶

In a single phrase, “seven days from my chief,” Grier managed to sum up the functional nature of British imperial administration in the Dependent Empire. With a full week’s journey separating him from his nearest superior, a rudimentary communication system acting as his only link to the outside world, and an engrained sense of pride and assurance of his own independent self-sufficiency, Grier understood, like so many of his fellow colonial civil servants, that he had the power to govern, to scheme, and—as he saw it—to uplift. Later, in 1911, Grier wrote again to his mother:

I am having a quite restful time touring the northern districts of this [Zaria] province. The beauty of it is one is so absolutely one’s own master. One cannot see any other European and so can regulate one’s day to suit oneself...the result to myself is that I never feel fitter than when I am on tour.⁴⁷⁷

Ultimately, as is evident from the above, Grier was happiest and felt the most productive when he achieved the greatest degree of freedom. In the bush there was no one to bother him or to interfere with his own vision of ‘proper’ administration. He was far from the red tape for which he had a deeply imbedded disdain. In effect, he was headmaster of his own district.

Countless voices resonating from the colonial civil services during this same era echo precisely Grier’s assertions. Frank Longland described the solitude of his service in Africa during and after World War I, explaining:

There might be a European, or South African policeman, or a Stock Inspector, or the like on the station, but more often than not I was alone. There was no telephone, no telegraph, no wireless. Communication with [headquarters], or your neighbor was by native runner and very slow (I did not know of the armistice [of World War I] in 1918 until a week or so later)...Mails were irregular and took a long time to come from home...Besides being a magistrate, one was doctor (Spanish flu agreed with my district

⁴⁷⁶ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his mother, April 25, 1907.

⁴⁷⁷ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his mother, August 20, 1911.

and I did not know what it was, or why natives died despite of quinine), one was road man, tax collector, sub-accountant, postmaster, and...customs officer.⁴⁷⁸

One can only imagine that if it took more than a week for word of the end of the Great War to reach Longland—an event of indefinable significance—how much longer it might have taken for vastly less significant news (or orders) to reach the eyes and ears of colonial civil servants, and *vice versa*. Furthermore, even in peacetime Longland remembered that, throughout his *decades* of service as a district administrator in Africa, he never once travelled to the capital to personally to report to the Governor or the , nor did he remember any of his colleagues going either. In four years of administering the Kigoma district in Tanganyika his senior officers rarely visited him, and the Acting Governor and Chief Secretary each toured his district only once. In one particularly candid moment, Longland recounted that a friend and fellow district officer jokingly complained to him—likely with a grimace—that “he might be dead and rotten before anyone knew.” Another of Longland’s contemporaries in Nigeria remarked honestly about his posting to Katsina province that he was “the sole pebble on the beach,” totally left to conduct business as he saw fit.⁴⁷⁹ Overall, Longland summed up his experiences by proclaiming in retrospect, “we did our job as best we could and hoped for the best.”⁴⁸⁰

The same was true all across the Empire. In 1923 John Carrow was the acting district officer of Hadejia, a small division located in Kano Province, Nigeria. Hadejia sat in the northernmost region of the colony on the Hadejia River, a tributary of the larger Yobe River. Located some 120 miles northeast, Hadejia was a seven or eight day’s walk to the more urban center of Kano, which was the home of Carrow’s immediate superior, the provincial

⁴⁷⁸ RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480. Box 4, File 1, Folio 58: “Responses to questions posed to Frank Longland,” 27 April 1965.

⁴⁷⁹ Unpublished letter to Robert Heussler, as quoted in Robert Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*, 35.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

commissioner. Much of this northern sector consisted of wetlands that surrounded the two major waterways. According to Carrow, during the rainy season, which generally stretched from mid-March to mid-July—and again from September to October—travel between Hadejia and Kano was virtually impossible. During such periods Carrow recalled, “I was the only white man in the station, or for miles around, and neither the Resident nor any one else made any attempt to visit me until the rains were over and the roads re-opened for the dry season.”⁴⁸¹ In the wet months, with no telegraph service, Carrow was completely cut off from headquarters and his nearest superiors. In this type of environment, he admitted, his senior officers exhibited, at best, minimal influence over his district. Even in the dry season, when communication between his division and HQ was more feasible, Carrow recalled: “provided the district officer was making a reasonable attempt to keep within the broad lines of the Resident’s policy,” it was very unlikely that his district schemes would be interfered with.⁴⁸² In short, for more than half of the year, Carrow was left entirely to his own devices. For the remaining six months, he still retained an astoundingly free hand to pursue the measures he deemed appropriate.

As a district officer in Tanganyika during the inter-war years, E.K. Lumley served a number of tours in the so-called “lonely districts,” far removed from any meaningful form of government support or oversight. In his memoirs, Lumley remembered:

In the lonely districts, and these were numerous, officers would serve spells of a year or even two years without speaking their own language, except to themselves, or seeing another white man. Occasionally the [Provincial Commissioner], the Superintendent of Police, or some other official from the Provincial HQ might come up on visits of two or three days—which not everyone welcomed. Many district officers regarded them as disruptions that upset the rhythm of duty: better to stick it out on one’s own than suffer these well-meant intrusions. That, at least was my own feeling...A very small number of men broke under the strain of isolation, but the majority successfully completed their tour

⁴⁸¹ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Correspondence with John Carrow”. Box 6, folio 1. September 24, 1965, page 13.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

of duty. Some preferred this secluded life to the social amenities of the grander districts.⁴⁸³

Lumley and many other district officers spoke often of this idea of a “rhythm of existence.”⁴⁸⁴

Although they sometimes greeted visitors as a “temporary pause from their labors,” ultimately outsiders proved to be, in the words of Lumley, an unwanted distraction from the very important work of government.⁴⁸⁵ Isolated from most major forms of oversight, district officer’s’s were also free to try their hand at their own schemes. Kenneth Bradley stated plainly of his tenure in Nigeria:

...on any outstation, the [DO] was king of all he surveyed, able to do what he liked and to try his hand at anything. He was a road maker, bridge-builder, doctor, teacher, detective, policeman, magistrate, farmer, cattle-breeder and, if necessary, undertaker. Above all, he was the friend of his people, who trusted him. At Mumbwa we tried all kinds of things, on the principle that if an experiment failed nobody would know about it anyway, and that if it succeeded it could be reported to HQ and perhaps be found useful elsewhere.⁴⁸⁶

Also evident from their writings is the fact that this type of isolation was exactly the district officer’s preference. Not only did such seclusion allow them to run their own show, it also created an environment synonymous with their understanding of their own identity forged early on in the public schools. In short, solitude in the bush allowed the district officer to perform what he considered the ‘manly outdoor work’. J.H.G. Miller-Stirling, an administrative officer serving in Northern Nigeria wrote to his father in June of 1910:

I will not be comfortable until I get on tour next week. I shall get away on Monday at last I think and shall be away for a month to start with and then probably go off again after a week or two here [at the divisional headquarters] but my letters will be forwarded from there. Touring about out here is much the pleasantest form of life and you are not constantly worried with correspondence or trivial matters as you are at headquarters.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 12-14.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 46.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸⁶ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 70.

⁴⁸⁷ RHO. Papers of Miller-Stirling: Letter to his father, June 24, 1910.

Miller-Stirling especially despised office work and much-preferred touring “out in the bush [where] one can do real political work and get to know something about the country and all the chiefs in the divisions.”⁴⁸⁸ Although during one long stretch from October 1910 to January of 1911, Miller-Stirling reported to his father that he had “not seen a white man for three months,” he confessed, “I cannot say I hope to see the Resident Kano round here soon.”⁴⁸⁹

Miller-Stirling also exemplified the core of the district officer’s attitude as he represented the common loathing of office work. Writing to his brother, Eddie, in early 1911, Miller-Stirling reported his gratitude for having a job that granted him such freedom:

I am very lucky in having a job on my own and all the others who came out with me last year are setting down at various headquarter stations and building houses and roads and doing office work, which is not to my idea what one comes out to this country for, and I must say that if I had had to choose my own job out here it would have been to be in charge of this Northern Division.⁴⁹⁰

As this example demonstrates, Miller-Stirling much preferred the active life of political work in the backcountry of his district to chipping away at mountains of red tape in the more populous cities. Instead, he always actively sought after responsibility and influence. As he points out to his brother, his dream job in the Empire was to be left alone to his own devices and placed *in charge* of his own division where he could run things as he saw fit. For Miller-Stirling, there could be no more of a worthy enterprise than service abroad. Just as Grier wrote to his mother, explaining the necessity he felt to do something that mattered, so too did Miller-Stirling long for a career that truly felt meaningful. In February of 1911, Miller-Stirling wrote home to his younger brother, advising him of the merits and satisfaction of performing diligent service:

You can take it from me as an absolute fact that when you first begin to earn your own living you will find it the happiest time of your life—at any rate much better than

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. Letter to his father: January 11, 1911.

⁴⁹⁰ RHO. Miller-Stirling Papers: Letter to Eddie: February 7, 1911.

anything up till now. And it is a great thing to think one has a job and whatever happens you are so grateful that you could always get something to do. By this of course I mean some decent job and not necessarily stone breaking or digging which anyone of no education at all would always do. In many ways of course a job like mine is first rate. You are pretty independent and have a lot of responsibility and though one's pay is not magnificent...it is enough and one has a good deal of power and authority, though that gives one a good deal of responsibility in using it rightly. But here of course life is not the simple and easy job it is at home and you can't just sit down and have everything done for you as some can in a civilized country. You have got to know things and find them out by experience. Your own food, cooking, the house you live in, everything, has to be looked after by yourself and you have to see that everything is done. Beyond this, of course there is your work and no work could possibly give one more variety than this does: one day one thing, another something else, and when you get up you so often don't know what you may have to do before the day is over. The fact of being alone is in some ways and to some people a drawback and plenty of men can't stand it, but I find that, as long as I have plenty to do, I don't much mind. There is no doubt to live a real life one must get out of civilization and go to some part where you have yourself only to depend on and if a man is worth anything it will improve him enormously. A man may stay at home for years and people think a lot of him, while if he only has himself to depend on and he has to act on his own he may turn out a regular "sotter". However I daresay before long, you will also get to some back end of the earth and the trivial affairs of English everyday life will appear very unimportant when you do.⁴⁹¹

One can acquire a rather firm grasp of Miller-Stirling's conception of 'manliness' and 'service' from this short excerpt. Writing of his own experiences in the Empire, Miller-Stirling encouraged his brother to find a vocation that was meaningful, demanded responsibility, and one where he could obtain a significant degree of independence. A life of effortless luxury, he argued, would bring no true satisfaction—only a sense of unfulfilled longing. Only commitment and sacrifice, he determined, could demonstrate the true measure of a man and provide one with wholesome gratification.

Mimicking Miller-Stirling's conclusions, E.A. Temple-Perkins happily accepted the most isolated of posts upon his return to Uganda in 1922. Following his appointment to Karamjoa, a remote district located in the northeast, the Chief Secretary asked Temple-Perkins how he felt about being assigned to such a distant region. Responding happily, Temple-Perkins explained

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

that he was thrilled to accept a division with “only six whites in 10,000 square miles.” Further, he exclaimed: “I can think of nothing I should like better...I really prefer the wilds.”⁴⁹²

Even beyond their isolation, most often, the district officer’s immediate superior, the Resident or Provincial Commissioner encouraged—or at the very least turned a blind eye to—their district officer’s independent action. John Carrow, who served both as a district officer and, later, as a Resident, remembered:

Most Residents (I certainly did) expected the district officer to get on with the job and not seek approval all the time—I always insisted that provided the district officer stuck generally to my overall ideas and policy he need not be afraid that I should object. Anyway he would finally be judged by how well or how poorly [the district] functioned.⁴⁹³

In one particular episode as Resident, Carrow described an encounter he had with one of his junior district officers who had recently signed on to the African services after a string of tours in the British Royal Navy. Although finding him “a little slow mentally,” Carrow acknowledged that he had no major complaints against the young man, but was surprised one afternoon when the greenhorn suddenly demanded, “you don’t like me do you?” More than a little shocked, Carrow denied any such harsh feelings and enquired as to the cause of the outburst. In response, the district officer complained that his experiences in the colonial service differed significantly from his training in the navy. He told Carrow:

If you would tell me to go to A and do something definite, as would have been the practice in the Navy, then I would do it quickly and efficiently and you would have no cause for complaint about my work. But this vagueness in your directions is beyond me and in violation of my naval training.⁴⁹⁴

Now more than a little shocked, Carrow responded

⁴⁹² RHO. Temple-Perkins Memoirs, 14-15.

⁴⁹³ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Correspondence with John Carrow”. Box 6, folio 1. September 24, 1965, page 13.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

When you were Officer of the Watch at sea in a battleship and some emergency occurred in the middle of the night, whose advice could you ask before you took urgent and immediate action to avoid a disaster?"⁴⁹⁵

The obvious implication of Carrow's allegorical response was that service in the Empire was not unlike the duties of a night watchman aboard a battleship. Rarely did one have the time or the capacity to ask for counsel or guidance from one's superiors. District administration in the Empire provided few opportunities for outside support. One had no choice but to be self-reliant and a free-thinker, willing to make minute to minute decisions without receiving supportive reassurances or a kindly pat on the back. In Carrow's estimation, district officers were not entitled to affirmation, nor should they expect it. This was exactly the kind of attribute most district officers desired of the Residents.

As acting district officer in Zaria Province in 1909, Grier reported to his sister that the central administration had placed him under the supervision of a new Resident. Of his new boss, Grier wrote

I rather like what I saw of my new chief. He was by way of making his self very pleasant and seems inclined to make me run $\frac{3}{4}$ of the province as well as the railway, which is scarcely a fair division of labor...On the whole I think he is quite a nice old man by no means clever but possibly saved from utter brainlessness by a good deal of common sense. As at present he seems sufficiently convinced of the necessity of letting me run things my own way. I hope we shall get along very nicely.⁴⁹⁶

Grier's relationship with his district resident was far better in this case than it was with many other members of the government. While Grier was happy to have a boss that allowed him a free hand in his district, he became quite disdainful when a member of the government became too intrusive. Writing to his sister on an earlier occasion, Grier explained a feud he had been having with the colonial treasurer:

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his sister, Dorothy. September 12, 1909.

At present I am rolling along quite comfortably and hope that all will be well. The only man I can't quite stick is the local Treasurer who is an obstructionist of the first water—he is apt to make unnecessary difficulties and is a typical red tape official.⁴⁹⁷

Though technically a government bureaucrat in his own right, Grier saw himself as anything but this kind of “red tape” official.

As Carrow insinuated, a district resident could be either the best friend or the worst enemy of a district officer, depending upon the amount of autonomy given to the latter by the former. In many cases district officers came to lean on the support of Residents, like Carrow, to let them run their own show. However, if the district officer did not receive that support things could become much more complicated. For instance, while serving as an administrative officer in Sokoto, Nigeria from 1928 to 1935, Bryan Sharwood-Smith received a directive from the central administration stating that no crops should be cultivated within a specified distance from any and all human dwellings. The health authorities in the Secretariat justified these measures as a precaution against mosquitos and flies that served as carriers of malaria and dysentery.⁴⁹⁸ For several reasons, Sharwood-Smith concluded that these orders were absolutely unacceptable in his particular division. In short, he contended,

...apart from the fact that the local people had a large measure of immunity against both diseases, the soil in question [near the villages in his district] was, by far, the most fertile available thanks to generations of household and animal refuse. In a place like Sokoto where food was already short this made no sense at all.⁴⁹⁹

In response to the new orders, Sharwood-Smith objected profusely. Once he received the mandate from government's health inspector, he immediately filed a compliant with his superior, the District Resident. Though, according to Sharwood-Smith, the latter would hear none of his

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. Letter to his sister, October 23, 1906.

⁴⁹⁸ RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss.Brit.Emp.s.480. Box 6, folio 2. “Questions and Topics of Interest to Sharwood-Smith”, June 9, 1965, page 21.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

grievances. In the aftermath, he reported, “On tour that year I encountered an entire hamlet on the move because some over zealous Health Inspector had insisted on the wholesale uprooting of crops around their houses.”⁵⁰⁰ In his anger, Sharwood-Smith recalled: “A good Resident would have either side-stepped the issue or put his foot down and damned the consequences.”⁵⁰¹

Most significant of all, though, was the fact that if a district officer received a policy from the government he deemed to be inappropriate for his district, he could—and many times did—“turn a deaf ear or a blind eye to instructions from on high.”⁵⁰² An exceptionally brash representation of this kind of autonomy and its results can be witnessed in the career of E.K. Lumley, who served as a district officer in the British administration of Tanganyika for twenty-one years, from 1923 to 1944. Very often, Lumley found himself stationed in extremely remote districts, typically more than a seven day’s trek from his nearest superior. As a result, Lumley’s work was rarely disrupted by orders from his own chiefs while serving in these outlying villages. According to Lumley, “as long as our reports arrived regularly, [headquarters] concluded that all was well.” Otherwise, he was left to his own devices, which he much preferred to any “well-meant intrusions” from above.⁵⁰³ The sheer isolation from any type of authority figure allowed for district officers, like Lumley, to enjoy a great deal of freedom and permitted them the agency to pursue their own individual ambitions for the communities under their charge. While overseeing his district in Kobondo in 1927, Lumley took a particular interest in a poor tribe, known as the Ha, who had difficulties paying their taxes to the central administration. Lumley feared that if the people of the Ha sold their food to pay for their taxes that, ultimately, they

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate: A British District Officer in Tanganyika* (London: Archon Books, 1976), 10.

⁵⁰³ Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 12.

would not have enough to eat and would inevitably go hungry. Thus, instead of promoting the sale of agricultural foodstuffs in his district, Lumley proposed raising bees and growing coffee plants.⁵⁰⁴ Combined, the sale of these two commodities would supplement the income of the Ha, increase revenue, and provide a way for them to pay their taxes without inflammatory repercussions.

At his own expense and without informing his superiors, Lumley imported one hundred select coffee plants into his district from a Belgian nursery in Burundi. Once he obtained the trees, he distributed them amongst the chiefs in neighboring villages to be planted and cultivated. According to Lumley, the advantage of obtaining these particular trees was that they had been scientifically grown under the eye of experts in up-to-date nurseries, and proved capable of growing in soil similar to what could be found in his region. Believing he had conceived an honorable plan to solve one of his district's many problems, Lumley finally reported his actions to his immediate superior, the Provincial Commissioner. However, rather than receiving the expected commendations and praise for his ingenuity, the P.C. sent a dispatch to Lumley's office, reprimanding him. According to headquarters, the act of importing the coffee plants from outside the colony's borders represented an offense under the Colonial Government's Plant and Pest and Disease Ordinance.⁵⁰⁵ In accordance, the P.C. ordered Lumley to destroy the trees immediately.

Later, Lumley recorded that this particular episode had taught him an unfortunate lesson about district administration in the Empire. This "exasperating instance of officialdom," he wrote, "taught me never to report too much to headquarters." He concluded that it would be

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 26.

much better “to forgo the praise than risk the reverse.”⁵⁰⁶ What Lumley did next was truly remarkable. In direct defiance to the command he received from the central administration, Lumley ordered his chiefs to conceal his coffee trees “from alien eyes,” and untruthfully reported back to his superiors at Government House that the trees had been uprooted in compliance with their instructions.⁵⁰⁷ Instances such as these are particularly telling with regard to the way that the district officer viewed his position. A severe ‘telling off’ from the central administration did not compel Lumley to follow the rules; instead, these instances only encouraged him to become more autonomous. Writing retrospectively of the experience, Lumley added that he hoped that those coffee trees and their descendants still served as a source of wealth to the people of his former district, illustrating his own belief, even in hindsight, that no one knew how to care for the people of his district better than himself.⁵⁰⁸

This was not the only example of Lumley’s blatant disregard for governmental orders, though—far from it. In 1934 the secretariat assigned him to the district of Korogwe, under the posting of assistant district officer. Again in Korogwe, like Kobondo, famine proved to be one of Lumley’s constant worries.⁵⁰⁹ The dual challenges of limited food stores and an infestation of locusts served as two of Lumley’s major sources of anxiety. “The locusts,” Lumley remembered, “remained with us for nearly a year: I often looked up to the sky and saw it darkened by a swarm, which sometimes extended as far as the eye could see.”⁵¹⁰ To combat the threat, the central administration ordered that all villagers in the district, who were physically able, should respond to the situation by manually destroying the “hoppers”—the young locusts

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, 61.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 65.

recently hatched out of their eggs.⁵¹¹ Again, Lumley thought better of it. Openly disregarding the command, Lumley “told the chiefs and the headmen to ignore these orders.” He worried that by enforcing such a rule he would doom the people of Korogwe to a season of starvation, as they would spend all of their time attacking the locusts, rather than growing the crops necessary for their own sustenance. Instead, he “encouraged the people to grow crops that were immune to locust attack.”⁵¹² In his memoirs he recorded:

For this purpose I had an order passed by the Native Authority making it compulsory for every tax payer to grow cassava and sweet potatoes; imprisonment was proscribed for any one disobeying it...No one was exempted except the old and the sick...[Ultimately] we achieved the desired results; by December 1934 over 20,000 acres of these crops had been planted and the district was saved from the threat of famine...⁵¹³

As Lumley’s experiences with the colonial government proved, district officers commonly became emotionally connected with their territories and the people living therein. When this occurred, and it often did, most district officers were loath to perform any task they deemed contrary to the interests of their charge. As Sharwood-Smith reported, “broad lines of policy were laid down from on high. Local implementation was largely for the Resident to plan.”⁵¹⁴ Although “broadly” planned by those at Government House, Sharwood-Smith proclaimed:

In general the success of a policy depended on the ability and persuasiveness of those who put it into practice...On the other hand, unsound or stupid politics could become unstuck if the responsible man on the spot was prepared to make a case against them.⁵¹⁵

In Tanganyika, colonial serviceman John J. Tawney explained that throughout the colonial period, district officers were concerned with policy in two fundamental ways: “first, by deciding

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss.Brit.Emp.s.480. Box 6, folio 2. “Questions and Topics of Interest to Sharwood-Smith”, June 9, 1965, page 20.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

the means best suited in their own circumstances for implementing their basic [schemes].”⁵¹⁶

Second, the district officer exerted his influence by “drawing the Government’s attention to the need for new, positive measures, which their own resourcefulness was insufficient to introduce.”⁵¹⁷

Made plain the district officer, more often than not, decided the fate of government policy. The essence of the system was, as one Indian district officer stated simply,

For, however wise may be the measures introduced [by the colonial government], they will fail in their effect unless the district officer cooperates to ensure their success... dimly conscious as they [native populations] are of the great personages who sit in high places, the individual with whom the populace come into immediate contact is to them the embodiment of Government; his district is to such an officer a kingdom in miniature, and he has to learn the duties of a sovereign. Above all, as we hope to be able to show further on, the DO has to combine these exalted functions with the humbler but no less important one of friend of the people; that is, if he accepts his position and realizes his responsibilities.⁵¹⁸

As a young cadet, the rookie colonial serviceman emerged out of a culture that instilled within him an inherent belief in the necessity of self-reliance and a confidence in his predisposition to leadership. Furthermore, he arrived in an empire that forced him, through sheer isolation from authority figures, to lean on these qualities. In no time at all, district officers—in the same mind as Lumley, Grier, Bradley, Temple-Perkins, Sharwood-Smith, and so many others—made themselves comfortable as kings of their districts. Soon after adjusting to their environment, many district officers convinced themselves of the primacy of their own positions. Only a strong, confident, active district officer knew what was best, and only he could protect his people and the British imperial mission. J. Strachey of the Indian civil service clearly demonstrated this

⁵¹⁶ RHO. Heussler Papers: Letter to Heussler from John J. Tawney, 1960.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Anonymous, *Reform and Progress in India: A few thoughts on Administrative and other questions connected with the country and the People* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1885), 108. See also, Lumley, 9.

attitude, stating, “if the district officer is weak and incapable, authority and law in the district are weak also; if he is strong and competent, they are respected.”⁵¹⁹ Theodore Williams recalled in his diary of his time as a servant in Africa: “it is so much easier to go one’s own way...as a prince, as a despot...free to make what one can of the occasion than to fall in line...and be *prima inter pares*.”⁵²⁰ The success of a health plan or agricultural initiative, for instance, only went as far as the colonial civil servant cared to take it. If he deemed the proposed government scheme a worthy cause, he might use his powers of persuasion, his personal relationships, and his local authority to ensure their implementation. Yet, even in this case, he still molded the central administration’s scheme as he saw fit to ensure that it suited the conditions and people of his district; and it was only he who could determine that. On the other hand, if the district officer judged certain government pronouncements to be inappropriate to his division or its inhabitants, he might only give its implementation, at best, a half-hearted effort. The district officer supplied the initiative and momentum to administrative efforts. Charles Jeffries explained the nuances of colonial civil service best when he wrote in a government report:

The Colonial Administrative officer is necessarily more than a civil servant. Unlike his opposite number in the Home Civil Service, he is not subject to immediate ministerial and Parliamentary control. He cannot assume the cloak of anonymity or escape responsibility for determining policy. In short, he is not only an official, but [also] a politician. In most Colonies the civil servant is the Government, and not the servant of the Government.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ J. Strachey, *An Indian District By a District Officer*, 80-1.

⁵²⁰ RHO. Papers and Diaries of Theodore R. Williams. “Diary entry of April 22, 1917”

⁵²¹ RHO. Heussler Papers: Letter from Charles Jeffries to Heussler containing a report to the Colonial Office by Jeffries, October 22, 1963..

Kenneth Bradley added, “we knew our people and, as had always been the way of British administrators, we grew fond of them and defended them...against the more unrealistic edicts of desk-bound bureaucrats at far-away headquarters.”⁵²²

Studied with this understanding in mind, historians attain a significantly different representation of the British Empire and its administration. A scholar only privy to Colonial Office documents, for instance, is only informed of one side of the conversation. A study of imperial administration only at official levels results in a distorted picture of British imperialism. One might read Lumley’s correspondence with his Provincial Commissioner and conclude that, following his rebuke, Lumley—as he reported—followed orders to the letter and destroyed his precious coffee plants. Yet, through a study of the activities and personal reflections of the district officer, scholars can attain a very different conception of the Empire—one in which the literal man on the spot was king. The slowness of communication combined with the district officer’s natural proclivity toward self-reliance meant that imperial policy was implanted solidly in the hands of colonial bureaucrats at the local level. As will be seen in the next section, Whitehall and those at Government House had little choice but to live with the consequences.

⁵²² Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 45.

Of Jobs and Dead Men's Shoes:

The district officer's loathing of interference was especially well defined toward the so-called 'great men' of Whitehall and Government House. In general terms, officials in the colonies often regarded their superiors in London to be "uninformed meddlers who should refrain from exercising close control over the colonies."⁵²³ Perhaps no one, though, could be a greater annoyance to the district officer than the Governor of his colony. District officers were frequently contemptuous of "famous" governors and all the pomp that surrounded them.⁵²⁴ Grier and his fellow administrators abhorred interventions from their superiors stationed in far off Government Houses or located back home in the U.K. To the district officer, these officials had a limited window into the actual conditions in their districts—though, unfortunately for the district officer, these high-ranking figures tended to find great joy in making recommendations (i.e. giving orders) with little or no insight into the way things actually operated. Who better, according to Grier, to know what should or should not be done in a given district than the very man who was at the point of contact between the government and the people? To the district officer, colonial governors were often "old fools" likely to be "bamboozled" and, sometimes, just plain "too stupid for words."⁵²⁵ In February of 1910, Grier begrudgingly wrote to his sister that His Excellency [HE] was coming to his province in Zaria. Too busy with his own work, Grier happily reported later that his immediate superior, the acting district officer, "had the foresight to see that political work is of more importance than entertaining stray governors."⁵²⁶ Grier used all sorts of honest, if crude, phrases to demonstrate his lack of reverence for upper-crust officials:

⁵²³ Brian L. Blakeley, *The Colonial Office*, xii.

⁵²⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480. Box 1, File 5, Folio 4. "Notes on an interview with Herbert E. Newnham. Oxford. August 6, 1959.

⁵²⁵ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, August 18, 1909.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

the Lieutenant-Governor could be a “dishonest rogue,” the High Commissioner an “old ass,”; the governor an “obstinate man.”⁵²⁷

The appointment of a new colonial governor was a time of great anxiety because, in the words of Grier, an “incompetent governor” could very easily come along and wreck the established order and stability of things.⁵²⁸ These sentiments were particularly evident in Northern Nigeria in 1910 with the Colonial Office’s appointment of the enormously unpopular, Henry Hesketh Bell, to the post of governor. While surprisingly little information is known about Bell’s youth and his upbringing, it is certain that he was born in December of 1864 in the West Indies, after which he spent most of his adolescence and teenage years with his father, Henry Bell, in France and Belgium. Interestingly, during his formative years Bell received only a limited education.⁵²⁹ Despite this fact, Bell’s public career began in 1882 when he went to work as a clerk in the colonial government of Barbados. Subsequently, he joined the colonial services in 1890 and was placed in a customs office in the Gold Coast where he worked until 1894 when he was forced to return to the Caribbean due to failing health. A decade later, Bell’s first major posting came in 1905 when the Colonial Office named him High Commissioner of Uganda. After four years of service in East Africa, Bell was offered the governorship of Northern Nigeria, which he duly accepted in 1909.⁵³⁰

Of all of the examples of gubernatorial disdain, perhaps none stands out quite like that of Hesketh Bell and his stint as governor of Nigeria. Writing home to his father in May of 1910 as a relative newcomer to the Northern Nigerian Service, J.H.G. Miller-Stirling reported that the

⁵²⁷ RHO. Grier Papers, “Letter to his mother.” March 25, 1916; Letter to his sister, August 18, 1909; Letter to his mother, March 14, 1911.

⁵²⁸ RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, February 10, 1910

⁵²⁹ C. J. F. Alderman, ‘Bell, Sir Henry Hesketh Joudou (1864–1952)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

recently appointed governor, “[Bell] is not thought much of here and is not a good man for the job at all.”⁵³¹ Furthermore, the officers under whom Miller-Stirling worked held the opinion that Bell was “very much lacking in energy” and contended that, “very likely he will not remain long as Governor.”⁵³² As a personal note, Miller-Stirling wrote to his father of Bell’s governorship: “it is a great pity to have a man of that sort whom they [fellow district officers] describe as insignificant...this is certainly no country for the ‘slacker’.”⁵³³ Grier, who also served in Nigeria during Bell’s tenure, described the governor as a “rather trying little man...who knows little of political work, and cares less.”⁵³⁴

Particularly, what Grier and Miller-Stirling found so infuriating about high-ranking officials, like Bell, was the fact that they were so often prone to what Miller-Stirling called “special crazes”—‘developmental’ schemes with little (if any) practical benefit.⁵³⁵ In effect, a visiting governor or other high-ranking official to a district officer’s’s district was a great distraction because the ‘great man’ had to be “looked after” and “kept entertained.”⁵³⁶ When Bell made his way to Mill-Stirling’s district in June of 1910, the latter had to wait for the Governor at the train station for more than three hours, instead of completing his afternoon work. In light of these types of experiences Mill-Stirling complained

He [Bell] is a great nuisance here as we have to run round finding carriers for his luggage and then probably things get lost or left behind somewhere. He has already sent on 40 loads, which arrived here today and are to be sent on to the head of the Railways at once. He will probably bring another 70 or 80 loads with him when he comes and I suppose they will all be brought up to the Residency for one night and then taken down again the next day....Then I will have to amuse him by playing tennis with him in the afternoon. I

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his mother, August 20, 1911; RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to Dorothy, October 8, 1911.

⁵³⁵ RHO. Mill-Stirling Papers. Mss. Afr.s.2051: Letter to his father, June 5, 1910.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

am afraid I am grumbling a good deal, but this sort of thing is so wretched when there are so many important things to be done in other parts of the Division and you neglect them for things that are of no importance at all.⁵³⁷

It wasn't only the pomp and the exigency of governors, but their grand ideas that tormented the district officer. Of Bell, Grier stated: "unfortunately his interests are subjects about which I know and care nothing—e.g. he is great on laying out Zaria as a sort of garden city and planting avenues of trees," but Grier admitted, "that is not my *métier*." Even more infuriating for Miller-Stirling was Bell's seemingly bazar plan to "burn down" his district's town center, only to "build a new town in a different place." After driving the Governor around for hours on a tour of his division, Miller-Stirling bitterly wrote to this father: "the new town [proposed by Bell] is to be in the shape of a Union Jack with the market in the center and sixty-six foot wide roads and all the rest of it."⁵³⁸ To please the Governor, Miller-Stirling reported that he "drove in a few stakes," in accordance with Bell's plans, but confessed that he "doubted if anything will ever come of it."⁵³⁹ Furthermore, during their visit, Bell also informed Miller-Stirling of his desire to promote the production of cotton in the district. To this, Miller-Stirling wrote home privately: "[growing cotton] strikes me as a bit absurd in a country in which the people cannot often grow sufficient food to keep themselves alive, especially at present."⁵⁴⁰ He went on to say that most of the other political officers with whom he was acquainted quite agreed with him and that they were all "very much opposed to the Governor's schemes."⁵⁴¹

Not only was Bell incredibly unpopular because of his high-maintenance and his seemingly hair-brained schemes of civic engineering, but also there was another very interesting

⁵³⁷ RHO. Miller-Stirling Papers: Letter to his mother, June 30, 1910.

⁵³⁸ RHO. Mill-Stirling Papers. Mss. Afr.s.2051: Letter to his father, June 5, 1910.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

element that likely caused him to be exceptionally disliked across the colony. A number of political officers viewed Bell as being especially out of touch with realities in Africa and, frankly, more ignorant than most. During his tenure in Nigeria, Bell was described as being “tied to a tiger.”⁵⁴² Lord Lugard wrote of “poor Bell” as being “not the type of governor who tries to overawe his subordinates.”⁵⁴³ A possible explanation for Bell’s unpopularity has to do with his social and educational background—or, perhaps more accurately stated, lack thereof.⁵⁴⁴ With such a seemingly obscure set of credentials—no formal public school education, no Oxbridge pedigree, and limited experience in West Africa—most district officers viewed Bell with the utmost suspicion.⁵⁴⁵ It frustrated Miller-Stirling and his colleagues that they were forced to take orders from a man who, as they understood it, lacked even the most basic qualifications. After dining with the governor in August of 1911, for instance, Grier wrote to his mother: “he [Bell] is a pleasant little man, though he misses that type of good manners which one only finds with good breeding.”⁵⁴⁶ Grier and Miller-Stirling viewed Bell as an outsider—a kind of pretender to the Nigerian throne.⁵⁴⁷ To the political officers in the districts who served him, the governor seemed to be the epitome of the office type, constantly worried about his own health and, to some, he gave off the impression that he absolutely hated life in Nigeria.⁵⁴⁸ Had they even been willing to display blind loyalty or support for the policies of the governor under

⁵⁴² Robert Heussler, *The British In Northern Nigeria*, 39.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ Grier and Miller-Stirling were certainly not alone in their disdain of Bell. In their correspondence, each man mentions on numerous occasions that their feelings were not unique to themselves. On multiple occasions they list—or at the very least reference—companions and co-workers who they reported to be equally fed up with the governor. See, for instance, RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his mother, August 20, 1911; RHO. Miller-Stirling Letters. “Letter to his Father” May 1, 1910.

⁵⁴⁶ RHO. Grier Papers: Letter to his mother, August 20, 1911.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ RHO. Miller-Stirling Letters. “Letter to his Father” May 1, 1910.

normal circumstances, Grier, Miller-Stirling, and their fellow administrators in Nigeria were certainly not inclined to do so under Bell. In the words of W.R. Crocker, there was nothing worse than “the fake gentleman.”⁵⁴⁹ Crocker even went as far as to lament the admission of men into the imperial government from the “minor public schools,” such as “Evelyn Waugh, Lancing, and Herford College.”⁵⁵⁰ How much more must Crocker and his colleagues have resented a man like Bell who came from even more modest origins? Rather than be imbued with the necessary gentlemanly characteristics, those with such educational backgrounds, Crocker proclaimed, “struck the air of the ancient Catholic squire.”⁵⁵¹

Bell’s was not the only instance of snobbish colonial service rejection. In 1923 the Rajah of Sarawak, Charles Vyner Brooke, named John Coney Moulton to the position of Chief Secretary. This placed Moulton at the head of the Secretariat and essentially solidified him as second in command in the government. One district officer in particular, Donald Adrian Owen, lamented both publically and privately Moulton’s appointment to such a high-ranking position. Specifically, Owen took exception to the fact that, in his opinion, Moulton had virtually no governing experience, the latter having previously served merely as the curator of the Singapore and Sarawak museums.⁵⁵² In the weeks that followed Moulton’s appointment, Owen wrote a number of letters to both fellow government servants and to the Rajah himself, complaining of the injustice of Moulton’s appointment.⁵⁵³ In August 1923, Owen boldly denounced the Rajah’s choice of Moulton and threatened to resign his post if Moulton remained. Owen complained directly to the Rajah,

⁵⁴⁹ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Letter from W.R. Crocker” August 16, 1960.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² RHO. Donald Adrian Owen Papers. GB 0162 MSS.Pac.s.103. “Letter to the Rajah, August 19, 1923.

⁵⁵³ Ibid. See letters dated August 19, 1923; August 29, 1923; December 22, 1924.

I do not wish you to imagine that I am merely saying this because I wished for the post [of chief secretary], for I can assure you I did not, and I knew well that I should not have been offered it, in any case, but I can say the appointment came as a great surprise and I am consequently anxious to know in what way the Service will be affected by it. For instance—are the decisions of the Resident’s Court liable to be reversed by the late Curator of the Museum?⁵⁵⁴

It was not only Moulton’s unconventional background that irked Owen, but also the fact that, in Owen’s words, Moulton held the status of an “outsider with no special qualifications,” who would be “permitted to administer the Government of Sarawak over the heads of senior officers.”⁵⁵⁵ Despite these protestations, the Rajah was not deterred. Six days later Owen received only a short, stinging reply from Brooke who made clear his unwillingness to discuss the matter with Owen any further.⁵⁵⁶

However, Owen was not alone in his resistance to the Rajah’s new appointment. A year into Moulton’s tenure as chief secretary, it was clear that relations were tense between the secretariat and the district officers in the outstations. George Beresford-Stooke, a veteran of the Sarawak service, echoed Owen’s complaints in December of 1924 when he jeered: “Perhaps some day H.H. [His Highness the Rajah] will realize that the government of a country is not a job that can be tackled by any old beachcomber or Museum Curator. A man must be specially trained and must have spent his life at it.”⁵⁵⁷ Owen and Beresford-Stooke’s correspondence also make clear that they were not in the minority with regard to their feelings about Moulton. On December 7, 1924 Beresford-Stooke wrote the following to Owen:

The receipt of your telegram upset us both very much indeed. Where the devil this unfortunate country is going to end at this rate, one shudders to contemplate. All the decent people down here are fed up to the teeth with it—Cunningham, Lang, Aplin—to quote three men who formerly never murmured a word against Sarawak. Aplin himself

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. August 19, 1923.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. “Letter to Owen from the Rajah.” August 29, 1923.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

told me the other day—walking home from the office—that he wished to Heaven he could afford to clear out, but the poor man is not due for pension and has already been here too long to be able to cut it and start afresh somewhere else. MacBryan, as you know, has already resigned. I have fired in an application to the Colonial Office and I'm prepared to go to West Africa rather than come back here...⁵⁵⁸

Owen, Beresford-Stooke, and other colonial civil servants found it difficult to respect the Rajah's appointment because they clearly saw it as a disgrace to their ranks. Colonial civil servants contended that certainly not everyone was fit for administration—quite the contrary. For these men, administration was an art. In the words of Kenneth Bradley, it was something that was “more often caught than taught.”⁵⁵⁹ Stated another way, leadership was engrained and instilled, not simply understood or acquired. The ability to govern justly, they concluded, was “like many of the best things in life, such as getting religion or falling in love.”⁵⁶⁰ Just as one cannot be told how to love, they reasoned, one could also not simply expect to know how to administer without the proper experience.⁵⁶¹ Here again, we see the public school emphasis on instilled leadership at work in the lives of colonial civil servants. A district officer's approach to governance had to be something deeper than just intellectual understanding—it had to be apart of who they were. Being considered a capable and respected administrator was a two-part process: one had to have the right background, *but* also he had to demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice and serve. One without the other simply would not suffice. Most district officer's's like Bradley, Owen, Beresford-Stooke, and others accepted these notions as gospel. As opposed to rules and red tape, district officers at the height of Britain's Empire talked about “the code”; they referred to “the right type of men”; and triumphed the one who was “trained for nothing but

⁵⁵⁸ RHO. Owen Papers. “Letter to Owen from George Beresford-Stooke.” December 7, 1924.

⁵⁵⁹ Kenneth Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 1-2.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

supposed to be ready for anything.”⁵⁶² Men like Moulton and Bell, they concluded, fell outside this elite circle. Beresford-Stooke noted that Moulton’s appointment was especially disgraceful, “when you consider that [he] could not pass the ordinary cadet’s examination—knows damn all about government orders or court procedure—or about outstations...”⁵⁶³

These two examples—the first of Bell in Nigeria and the second of Moulton—provide a number of important insights into the mind of the district officer. First and foremost, district officers legitimately feared what their own submission to the ‘wrong sort’ might mean to the survival of the Empire. They often lamented decisions from on high because they believed upper-crust officials—even those with better reputations than Moulton or Bell—had a very minimal understanding of the realities on the local level. It took a combination of characteristics to effectively administer the colonies. First, one had to have the correct gentlemanly background. Just as important, though, Grier, Miller-Stirling, and Owen argued that one had to embody the qualities of service-mindedness. To the above-mentioned district officers, Bell and Moulton had neither.

In a further example J. Rooke Johnston, a district officer to Tanganyika during the inter-war years, endured the bumbling recommendations of a visiting governor on numerous occasions. In one specific instance, the acting Governor, Harold MacMichael, made an “unofficial visit” to Johnston’s district at an outpost in Tabora, located in the western province of the colony, some 250 miles east of Lake Tanganyika. Beyond the mere disruption of his daily work, Johnston, his staff, and a handful of other district officers from around the region had to organize a myriad of exhibitions, outings, meetings, and a dinner party for the governor and his

⁵⁶² Ibid, 4; See also Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, 411; Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 290.

⁵⁶³ RHO. Owen Papers. “Letter from Beresford-Stooke to Owen.” December 7, 1924.

wife. Following a morning parade of the King's African Rifles, held in the governor's honor, a handful of administrative officers invited the governor to attend a conference being held to discuss a recently imposed anti-sleeping sickness campaign currently underway in the territory.⁵⁶⁴ Present at the meeting was McMichael, Johnston, the Acting Provincial Commissioner, named Mitchell, the district officer of Tabora, and a handful of other government servants, including district officers from Kahma and Buha. At the start of the conference, the governor insisted on taking the lead in the discussions. However, according to Johnston, it was quickly apparent to everyone in the room that MacMichael "had not done his homework and had read none of the files on the subject...He labored hard, but nothing went right"⁵⁶⁵ Following a clumsy opening to the roundtable, Johnston remembered, "H.E., after realizing...the conference had started off on the wrong foot...stood down and took his chair in the corner of the dais."⁵⁶⁶ Afterwards, the Acting Provincial Commissioner took over but, in Johnston's words, "no progress was made."⁵⁶⁷

It was precisely these types of intrusions that most fatigued Johnston and his staff. By virtue of his position, Johnston lamented, MacMichael had been allowed to come in and run roughshod over the normal rhythms of administration. Important work had to be diverted—or put off altogether—in order to accommodate the whims and interests of His Excellency.⁵⁶⁸ What was perhaps equally as worrisome as the distraction of the governor's presence for Johnston was MacMichael's clear inability to participate in the discussions of matters of grave importance in the colony. By insisting on leading the conference, MacMichael was neither able to contribute to

⁵⁶⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers. Box 4, File 2, Folio 1: "J. Rooke Johnston's account, *Bits and Pieces: Seven Years in the Western Province of Tanganyika Territory*, 1933-1940.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

the conversation, nor learn anything valuable from the men on the ground about the constant threat that sleeping sickness posed in the territory. These kinds of examples represent the source of so much frustration for district officers like Johnston. It's also the reason why so many colonial servants feared policy from on high and even ignored it.

There was literally no limit to the lengths a district officer might go to attempt to save 'his people' from the whims and misunderstandings of the governor. While serving as resident in Zaria in 1911, Grier endured a visit by his eternal foe, Hesketh Bell. During his stay, Bell insisted on addressing the Emir and district chiefs of Zaria. Grier was forced to translate the Governor's words because, naturally, His Excellency was not competent in the local languages. The day after Bell gave his speech, Grier wrote candidly to his sister:

Yesterday I had to spend half an hour interpreting a long speech made by the governor to the Emir and District Chiefs. Part of it was quite good, but parts of it—well I was glad they were not entrusted to another interpreter. *Inter alia* I was told to say the Governor hoped that 'they would quickly develop and become civilized'.⁵⁶⁹

Shockingly, to his sister Grier admitted, "I paraphrased it and well it was not quite like that." He then continued

To start with I don't know the Hausa for 'civilized' nor does anyone else. Secondly, there is no particular reason to adopt a somewhat patronizing air to a set of men who in many ways are very highly civilized, although their standards may not be the same as our own.⁵⁷⁰

When one stops to consider the significance of this particular episode, it really cannot be described as anything but astonishing. On paper, Bell's post as Governor made him the most powerful man in the one of Britain's largest African colonies; yet, right under his very nose one of his district officers had the gusto to bend and shape the great man's words. Practically everything that has been demonstrated above with regard to the district officer's confidence, self-

⁵⁶⁹ RHO. Grier Papers. Letter to Dorothy. October 3, 1911.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

reliance, and defiance, can perhaps be summed up in this one moment. To Grier, Bell was clearly out of touch—he lacked local knowledge and his words were likely to offend and, potentially, cause disruption and instability. In the end Grier took it upon himself to keep the peace.

It was not merely the governors, though, that jaded the district officer. Members of the former's secretariat often proved equally as exasperating to officers of the colonial service who served in the outstations and sub-districts. Occasionally, representatives of the colony's secretariat might be sent out on special assignment to tour conditions in the district outposts. Visits paid by the central bureaucracy, though not at all commonplace, might occur for any number of reasons. A forestry officer might be sent to report on farming practices and irrigation, medical officers were occasionally sent out from the secretariat to inspect public health practices, and educational 'experts' periodically came to tour local schools. Although typically less distracting than the governor, visits made by members of the secretariat could often be equally distressing to the district officer's daily routine and only further bolster his disdain for metropolitan authorities. An excellent example of this kind of loathing can be witnessed in an episode that occurred during E.A. Temple-Perkin's career as he served at his residential station in Mbarara, Uganda. On this occasion, a treasurer was sent to Mbarara from Government House to inspect the district accounts.⁵⁷¹ His patience already thin, Temple-Perkins noted that his visitor took no time in becoming "quite keen on the workings of my office, especially the handling of government cash."⁵⁷²

One afternoon the treasurer, to whom Temple-Perkins sarcastically referred to as the "honourable [*sic*] gentleman," asked Temple-Perkins where the latter kept the keys to his strong

⁵⁷¹ RHO. Temple-Perkins, *Unadorned Career*, 27.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

room—a rudimentary vault used in many district headquarters to store government valuables and currency. Temple-Perkins responded by informing his guest that there were two keys to the room, one in his own possession and the other held by his clerk. Continuing, Temple-Perkins explained that, at night, he handed his copy of the key over to the police guard.⁵⁷³ Upon hearing this, the treasurer responded with a scoff: “Do you know that according to Financial Regulations Part I you should keep them always on your person when you are in the station—and if the Governor knew that you are handing them over to clerks and other people you would be sacked tomorrow?”⁵⁷⁴ This type of reaction being precisely what irked Temple-Perkins so much to begin with about ‘secretariat types’, he snapped back “Well, sir, I wish you would tell the Governor for I would rather be sacked than knocked on the head or speared one dark night.”⁵⁷⁵ Leave it to these intellectual, secretariat types, Temple-Perkins reasoned, to know the rulebook by heart, but to be completely lacking in common sense and clueless about the realities on the ground. Temple-Perkins knew that walking around in the dark with a vault key snapped on his belt practically invited an attack. How, he questioned, could the ‘honorable gentleman’ not see that?

This was not the only squabble shared between the two men during the treasurer’s stay at Mbarara—far from it. Later, the treasurer having regained his composure following his last telling off, enquired as to whether Temple-Perkins might have any suggestions he would like to submit to the central administration. Boldly and without hesitation, Temple-Perkins suggested,

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

“that some types of [government] circular did more harm than good.”⁵⁷⁶ Becoming more enraged as he spoke, Temple-Perkins continued

We in the administration can never understand why it is that in a country as opulent as Uganda, it should be necessary to issue 'pin-pricks', if I may say so, in the form of that circular on the question of payment of some paltry sum per diem for fuel and light... Do you now, sir, that district officers resent these circulars and there is always a chance that they may retaliate? Take it this way. Suppose while on safari a district officer about to examine old decrepit men for poll tax exemption found one morning 200 men standing there, and that the district officer had a touch of 'liver' or a slight attack of fever, he could *at one stroke of the pen* [the author's emphasis] exempt the whole lot instead of bothering to do the meticulously careful examination we usually undertake—and 200 men at 10/- each is 100 pounds loss to the Treasury, and the premise covers only one morning and one district officer. It is the most nauseating of duties when hundreds of old or diseased humans, many of the poor creatures suffering from elephantitis, leprosy, cancer, hydrocele, and other revolting diseases, are to be examined one by one to determine whether they should pay reduced tax or nothing at all.⁵⁷⁷

At this, eyes widening in a mixture of shock and anger, the treasurer responded, “But no district officer would dare to do that by way of retaliation?” Temple-Perkins countered simply, “you never know what an overwrought district officer might do if hard pressed.”⁵⁷⁸

In India, the general feeling amongst most district officers was no different. An important illustration of this fact can be found in the experiences of John Beames, whose career in the Indian Civil Service spanned a number of decades, beginning in 1858 just after the Indian Mutiny. Beames' own autobiography, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*, further highlights the never-ceasing tension present in relations between the upper-crust officials and the literal man on the spot.⁵⁷⁹ In the introduction, historian and former member of the ICS, Phillip Mason, noted of Beames, “He thought little of Lieutenant-Governors in general and almost every specimen of the

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid, 27-28.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian*,

class he met.”⁵⁸⁰ To this Mason added, “the things that happened to Beames were the kind of things that happened to all of us in India.”⁵⁸¹ Mason’s inference here was that all men of the ICS inevitably became the Sons of Martha. Beames was a pure example of this trend. On one occasion during his service Beames wrote of his relationship with the central government: “I was in fact called upon to act and not to act at the same time, a false position in which Government is fond of placing officers by way of shuffling off its own responsibility, a regular Secretariat trick.”⁵⁸² Again, to this point Mason added, “Here he [Beames] echoes the cry of every district officer...blamed for weakness if he does not act and for harshness if he does.” This, Mason continued, represented “the razor-edge which the administration has to walk.”⁵⁸³

The way Beames chose to navigate this double-edged sword was by taking full, personal responsibility for everything that happened in his district. When appointed to the district of Champaran, Bihar, Beames determined to be “the master of his own district.” He made this conclusion, he says, “not from the mere lust of power...but because the district was a sacred trust delivered to me by Government and I was bound to be faithful to that charge.”⁵⁸⁴ Relating to his duties, Beames admitted

I should have been very base had I from love of ease or wish for popularity sat idly by and let others usurp my place and duties. Ruling men is not a task that can be performed by *le premier venu* and though I was young at it, still I had five years’ training and experience prefaced by a liberal education, while these ex-mates of merchant ships and *ci devant* clerks in counting houses had neither.⁵⁸⁵

Here again, we see the dual emphasis being placed on background and education, along with experience. Ruling was not just anyone’s game. It was, as has been seen, perceived that

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid, 7-8.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid, 173.

leadership was caught, not taught. Like other district officers mentioned above, Beames noted throughout his career that visits by Viceroys or Governors did far more harm than good:

People who do not know India well imagine that a great deal of good is done by these State tours of Viceroys, Governors, and LGs. But my own experience leads me to doubt this. It may be that the local authorities succeed now and then in securing sanction to the execution of some work of great importance to their locality by showing the Governor the actual spot and proving to him by actual eyesight its necessity or usefulness. They are thus sometimes able to do, in half an hour's walk round a town or river bank, what they have been unable to achieve by months of writing to an unwilling or unintelligent Secretariat. But the idea that by a hurried tour—and all tours in so vast a country as India must be more or less hurried, because there is so much ground to be got over in a limited time—a Governor can make himself really acquainted with a province as big as England is a delusion. The place does not look itself to begin with, because it is dressed up for his reception and looks as unlike itself as a workman in his Sunday clothes. All the natural everyday dirt and misery is bundled out of sight. 'Eye wash', as it is called in India, prevails everywhere, even if everyone does not go to the length attributed by a well-known story to the Collector who had the trunks of trees on all the station roads white washed. So the great man does not see the real place, and unless he is an exceptionally keen sighted man he takes his superficial, hastily formed impressions for real knowledge, which does more harm than good. Ever afterwards he is prone to refuse sanction to proposals submitted by local officers, or to contradict their assertions, because of some erroneous impression he has imbibed on his hasty tour. Often, too, when he has promised on the spot sanction to some project, which has been shown and explained to him, he will withdraw that sanction on his return to Calcutta, because his secretaries have persuaded him that the local officers have hoodwinked, or at any rate, misinformed him. (237)

If also we set against the problematical benefit of the great man's seeing things, or thinking he sees them, with his own eyes, the real and undoubted mischief he does by disorganizing the whole administration for a week or more, closing courts, delaying the disposal of cases, putting a stop to businesses of all sorts, leading Municipalities and other public bodies to spend more money than they can afford in decorations, fireworks, illuminations, and triumphal arches, it will be seen that the net gain for these tours is infinitesimal, if not absolutely nil.⁵⁸⁶

For these reasons, the policies that originated in the Governor's Offices, many district officers argued, represented the single greatest threat to preservation of the Empire and the welfare of the people therein. Grier wrote to his sister in September of 1911:

Another form of annoyance consists of minute papers. Some busybody at H.Q. discovers that a handcuff is missing from our prison stores and I have to devise some sort of

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, 237-238.

explanation to account for such a dreadful calamity. Year by year I suppose we shall become more and more ‘red tapey’ till in years to come...I can see myself spending my days in the midst of files of minute papers and circulars, writing insufferable nonsense to which fortunately no one is the least likely to pay any attention.⁵⁸⁷

Adding to this view, a retired member of the Indian Civil Service, H.K. Trevaskis, wrote to the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* expressing his frustration that there was “nothing that an official in India can say or do that will stop the mad folly of British statesmen who are bent on destroying the Empire.”⁵⁸⁸ Continuing his diatribe, Trevaskis complained “all who have friends in India’s administration know there is a widespread distrust as to the results of White Paper policy.”⁵⁸⁹ Trevaskis continued

Viceroy and Governors, strutting their hour on stage, have succeeded or failed according to their particular policy of giving a free hand to their subordinates or withholding it from them...The other evil influence that is leading to administrative rot in the districts is the perpetual interference which of late years has characterized [headquarters’] action. Viceroy and others have not hesitated to meddle in matters that were formerly settled, easily and satisfactorily, by the man on the spot. Instead of receiving that sympathetic support which a man in his position might reasonably expect from his superiors, the district officer has found himself ‘let down’ repeatedly.⁵⁹⁰

It seemed obvious to Trevaskis and other members of the Colonial Service, like Charles Roe, that

almost every foolish question asked in Parliament, or brilliant idea to which the brain of the Indian Secretariat may give birth, results in a call for a report from the district officer. In the eyes of the people, the district officer is the embodiment of the Government.⁵⁹¹

The crux of the argument coming from the mouths of district administrators all across the Empire centered on the fear of losing control to the ‘great man’ and his retinue. For the district

⁵⁸⁷ RHO. Grier Papers. Letter to Dorothy. September 2, 1911.

⁵⁸⁸ Trevaskis, H.K. (ICS, retired), “India’s Real Administrator” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art [Saturday Review]* (144.4050) (June 10, 1933): 561-562.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Charles Roe, “The Civil Service as a Career” *The National Review* (37.220) (June 1901): 575-587

officer, the grave danger in enhancing the power of the Viceroy, the Governors, and the Secretariats rested on the former's belief that these figures lacked both the knowledge and the aptitude to make reasonable decisions. As Beames argued, these men did not "see" the real empire. District officers used many catchy phrases to describe their role in the Empire—they were "the men who got things done"; "the eyes and ears of the government"; "the lynchpin" of the British administrative system; yet, regardless of the title, the implication was the same: the district officer viewed himself as the only secure link between the Colonial Government and local communities.⁵⁹² Most political officers in the Empire deemed it to be part of their job to ensure that, through their ignorance, Whitehall and its appointed subordinates could not enact policies inconsistent with local realities.⁵⁹³ The subordination of the district officer, many argued, would result in the severance of the link between metropole and periphery, and the implications of such an event, they contended, would be disastrous for both the British Empire and, they believed, the people it ruled.

As the above instances demonstrate, district officers often viewed the central administration—principally the Governor and his Secretariat—as being more of an adversary than an ally. In fact, as Hugh Foot, who worked in the Colonial Service beginning in 1929, explained it, "a good district officer is the natural enemy of the secretariat."⁵⁹⁴ Not only did the district officer generally believe the central administration to be unformed, but very often they

⁵⁹² BLL. Mss Eur D714/5. Correspondence on the role of a District Officer by W.C. Dible of the Indian Civil Service. January 18, 1928.

⁵⁹³ This is a common sentiment throughout the writings of former district officers. For example, see Sir Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 48-9; RHO. Heussler Papers, "Notes from meeting with A.D. Garson" July 27, 1960; RHO. Heussler Papers, "Notes from a meeting with Herbert E. Newman," August 6, 1960; RHO. Grier Papers: MSS.Afr.s.1379: Letter to Dorothy Grier, August 18, 1909;

⁵⁹⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers: talk by Sir High Foot, Oxford, October 11, 1960.

also deemed residents of Government House to be a “different sort” entirely.⁵⁹⁵ district officers took great pains to distinguish the “organization man” of Government House who thought only of machinery and files, from the administrator in the districts who thought in terms of people.⁵⁹⁶ While the district officer saw himself as performing the “manly” outdoor work, trekking across his district and doing the actual administration, he viewed the members of the Secretariat as little more than soft bureaucrats who made copies out of their cozy offices and stuck their noses where they did not belong. In the words of one district officer, “A man who has served all his time in a Secretariat is apt to get into a rut, to value the written word in a minute paper above the subject with which it deals, and to be out of touch with realities.”⁵⁹⁷ Upon his visit to the Treasury Department in Zanguera, Northern Nigeria, Miller-Sterling reported, “everyone here does office work all day which I could not stand.”⁵⁹⁸ During his own service in Uganda, Temple-Perkins complained of one government official with whom he was acquainted: “he had impressed me as being singularly blasé as regards Africa and Africans,” and was “indifferent to anything that was not English.” Even worse, according to Temple-Perkins, his companion was “legally minded,” which “is regarded with much disdain in administrative circles.”⁵⁹⁹ John Strong, posted to Ceylon just before the outbreak of the First World War emphasized the importance of eliminating “the small minority [of candidates for the colonial service] who, though

⁵⁹⁵ BLL. Correspondence on the role of a District Officer by W.C. Dible of the Indian Civil Service. January 18, 1928.

⁵⁹⁶ Kenneth Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 86.

⁵⁹⁷ Sir Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1949), 50.

⁵⁹⁸ RHO. Miller-Sterling Papers. “Letter to his mother.” June 17, 1910.

⁵⁹⁹ RHO. Memoirs of E.A. Temple-Perkins entitled, “Unadorned Career,” 1925-1954, Mss. Afr. s. 1818, Box 9, page 5.

scholastically fully qualified, were not suitable, by reason of temperament, for anything but office jobs.”⁶⁰⁰

District officers concretely affirmed their own identities by determining what they were not. They were not, they reasoned, bureaucrats. In an article published in June of 1901 in the widely read journal, *The 19th Century and After*, Charles Roe took pains to illustrate the uniqueness of political officers in the Empire. In one section, Roe wrote that he believed the work performed in the Indian Civil Service to be “of much higher order” than that done by the English Civil Services.⁶⁰¹ In direct comparison, Roe emphasized that the work of the English Civil Servant at home consisted simply of carrying out the orders of others.⁶⁰² Conversely, Roe opined, the work of an Indian Civil Servant meant acting on one’s own accord and taking personal responsibility on matters of the greatest importance.⁶⁰³ Only one’s individual temperament, Roe believed, could determine whether a man might be a success or a miserable failure in the Empire.

In a report authored by Charles Jeffries, a close working associate with Ralph Furse, on colonial recruitment in 1943, Jeffries penned a section entitled, “Negative Factors—what the Colonial Civil Servant must not be.” The final and, according to Jeffries most important point, was that the colonial servant

Must not be a person who can find satisfaction in life only by gratifying intellectual or aesthetic tastes. Unless he is uncommonly fortunate, such a person is bound to feel out of his element in the atmosphere of the Colonies... the person whose tastes are exclusively 'intellectual' is unlikely to find satisfaction in the C.S., it is most important for an officer

⁶⁰⁰ RHO. Heussler papers. “Letter from John Strong.” September 9, 1961.

⁶⁰¹ Charles Roe, “The Civil Services as a Career” *The National Review* (37.220) June 1901, 586.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

to have interests apart from work, which will keep his mind alert as well as his body fit.⁶⁰⁴

Conversely, in a second section designated, “Positive Factors—What the Colonial Civil Servant should be,” Jeffries argued that the administrative officer must be far more than just a ‘thinking man’. In Jeffries’ words

He [the colonial servant] must be prepared to be thrown upon his own resources... A certain degree of mental as well as of physical toughness is required if an officer is to escape frustration and disillusionment. But it should be the toughness of moral fibre [*sic*] which is derived from unshakable basic convictions and not that which results from lack of imagination and sensibility...He will find that it will benefit his health, happiness, and social contacts if he can take part in some form of outdoor games.⁶⁰⁵

In each of the examples described above the implication is clear: district officers deemed certain types of men unsuitable for life as an administrative officer in the Empire. As a product of their Victorian public school education, most district officers had come to be concerned, first and foremost, with character, and that is how they judged people in the Empire. Their consideration of character was largely based on two crucially important assessments: first, did they have the right background? Were they apart of the club? Did they have a proper understanding of the ‘code’? Most all of these characteristics, they believed, could only have been acquired in the public schools and at Oxbridge. Beyond that, though, it was one thing to know the code or to be acquainted with it as an ideal, but it was quite another to embody it.

The career of John Parkin Postlethwaite provides an excellent case study for determining the aims and identity of the district officer in this regard. Postlethwaite arrived in Uganda as a Treasury Assistant for the Ugandan colonial service in 1909. Shortly after his arrival Postlethwaite, a product of Haileybury College, reported “I quickly realized...that a Treasury

⁶⁰⁴ RHO. Heussler papers. “Report by Sir Charles Jeffries” submitted to Heussler in a letter dated October 22, 1960.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

Assistant's life was very little different from that of a clerk in the City of London."⁶⁰⁶ In such a position, Postlethwaite found no peace or happiness, recalling later, "I immediately saw that, for me at any rate, peace, interest, and happiness lay only in the administrative service," and "that I only wanted to deal with men and not minute papers."⁶⁰⁷ In short order, he remembered, "I began to survey the position with a view to getting a live job in real Africa."⁶⁰⁸ For Postlethwaite, meaningful service to the Empire was impossible from an office building. He personally longed for a position among the people, in places where actual decisions could be made, and red tape avoided. After a bit of effort, he shortly procured a transfer to an administrative department, where he became an assistant district officer to Mbale in the easternmost region of the colony. In 1911, after two short years of district service, Postlethwaite was, once again, approached about a desk job. In his memoirs he recalled

At this time, I was approached privately and asked whether I would care for a transfer into the Secretariat. Had I accepted, I should presumably have spent the next fifteen years or so in a comfortable, healthy, but extremely uninteresting position, later on drawing a very considerable salary for performing purely clerical duties devoid of any great responsibility, and also devoid, incidentally, of any great probability of blotting my copybook, as long as I behaved nicely to the right people and applauded any senior's dicta. In the latter end, given reasonable luck, I should have found myself Chief Secretary or even a Governor, when the experiences of previous years could hardly have proved helpful as an education for decisive action or real knowledge of the country and administration. I shuddered at the prospect, and declined the suggestion with thanks.⁶⁰⁹

In this short description one can attain both a clear indication of Postlethwaite's motives for service in the Empire and a candid picture of his views on how one becomes governor or chief secretary in the Empire. To Postlethwaite, becoming governor or someone else of 'importance' in the Empire merely meant acquiring a familiarity of the procedural office work but, more

⁶⁰⁶ Postlethwaite, *I look Back*, 25.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

importantly, it required saying the ‘right’ things to the ‘right’ people. Advancement also meant getting in line with one’s superiors and their policies. Following this formula, Postlethwaite reasoned, was the key to promotion without having to acquire any “real knowledge” of the country.⁶¹⁰

Due to their open disdain for the ‘departmental mind’ and the intellectual ‘secretariat types,’ district officers tended to try to cut down on the procedural work as much as they possibly could. Writing to Selwyn Grier in January of 1908, Resident Charles Orr made a concerted effort to diminish the use of ‘officialise’ to speed along the progress of more important matters. “Don’t bother,” he wrote Grier to “have the honour [*sic*]” or “be my obedient servant” in ordinary reports.⁶¹¹ Perhaps surprisingly, Orr actually wanted to minimize what he termed “all the needless writing.” As Resident, Orr made himself the model superior for Grier because he took a ‘hands-off’ approach, reducing the number of reports and memoranda he expected from Grier. Yet, at the very same moment, Orr viewed the communication between district officers to be of much greater value than communication between the periphery and the center. In September of 1907 Orr stated as much in a letter to Grier:

Many thanks for your most interesting letter. It is by "swapping ideas" with district officers who are in close touch with the people that one manages to get hold of a policy which is really sound and acceptable to the people whose Government we have assumed responsibility for and is not a mere machine made system smelling of the lamp and nasty office files.⁶¹²

These sentiments presented themselves all across the Empire, whether in Africa, India, or elsewhere. Trevaskis wrote in June of 1933 that the “fruit of office and fat jobs in the Secretariat” was not the life for him; rather, he stated his conviction that the real administrator’s

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ RHO. Grier Papers. “Letters from Charles Orr.” January 9, 1908.

⁶¹² RHO. Grier Papers. “Letters from Charles Orr.” September 18, 1907.

occupation was the “backwoods district.”⁶¹³ Many D.Os regarded those suited for positions in the Secretariat as being the “more literate type of chap,” unable to perform the duties of physical administrative work in the bush.⁶¹⁴ District officers generally considered the Governor and his secretariat to be composed of intellectuals and ‘thinking men’—these figures had grand schemes, but lacked the courage or the aptitude to implement their plans. In the mind of the district officer, these people were their opposites. Defiance toward Government House represented a natural part of the district officerss day-to-day operation.

F.C. Royce, who served in Nigeria as a district officer until 1932, wrote to the Secretary of the State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonlad, in 1939 to complain that the “[Colonial] Service and [its] Departments desperately needed a drastic overhaul.”⁶¹⁵ Royce’s first protestation—one he deemed more important than all the rest—was to stress the necessity of appointing “a governor who has been trained to know his men.”⁶¹⁶ According to Royce, finding an effective governor began and ended with identifying someone who could relate to the district officer and his point of view. “This is not possible,” Royce continued, “for a person who has spent his life at an office table where he has little or no opportunity of studying even the office work of any department other than his own.”⁶¹⁷ Rather than drawing them out of a comparatively comfortable headquarters, devoid of all contact with local communities, Royce advised that men in the Secretariat and future governors should be assembled from pools of candidates who might “be able to coordinate his administrative service and departments and have

⁶¹³ Trevaskis, H.K. (ICS, retired), “India’s Real Administrator” *Saturday Review*, 561-562.

⁶¹⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers. Mss.Brit.Emp.s.480. Box 2. File 2, folio 29. “Letter from Charles Jeffries to Heussler, October 22, 1960.

⁶¹⁵ TNA. CO 583/244/21 (30451) Situation in Nigerian: views of Captain F C Royce, former district officer in Southern Nigeria, 1939

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

their confidence.”⁶¹⁸ This type of governor, according to Royce, would stand in marked contrast to the “financial ‘expert’, like Donald Cameron,” governor of Northern Nigeria, from 1931 to 1935, whom Royce dismissed as severely “lacking in personality.”⁶¹⁹

As for India, E.H.H. Edye, rejected governors and viceroys, in part, because of what he claimed to be the ever presence of their unwarranted self-importance. Edye commented in 1930, that English men and women were intimately familiar with the snobbery of wealth, birth, intellect, education, and brawn, which existed inside their own borders. Yet, he lamented, “with...the snobberies of India they are I think quite unfamiliar.”⁶²⁰ For Edye, the most blatant type of ‘imperial snobbery’ that occurred in India was what he termed, “the snobbery of office.”⁶²¹ Of his service in India Edye recalled, “it [snobbery of office] is so strong that it has to be considered even in making up a bridge table.”⁶²² The Duke of Windsor is supposed to have said that it was not until he visited the Government House in India that he understood what real pomp and ceremony was like.⁶²³ Meandering all around the governor’s residence walked servants adorned in scarlet coats and uniformed footmen. For Edye:

There [at Government House and in the Secretariat] they become members of a little clique, the loyalty of whose determination to keep each other in place is marred only by a rivalry for translation to the Government of India. The chosen of Simla—chosen only from the provincial secretariats—are gathered into a brotherhood of the same kind, but more august: secure in the knowledge that never again will they have to endure the torrid discomfort of the plains. All this may sound exaggerated. But though there have been several bearers of high office notorious all over India as painfully unfitted for their posts—all now serving in the country, English and Indian...It is a narrow and narrowing life, this of imperial headquarters, varied only by the two annual journeys, from Simla to Delhi and from Delhi to Simla—a life of the passing and re-passing of files, of tennis

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ BLL. E.H.H. Edye Papers, *What about India*, 1930.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ BLL. Memoirs of J.C. Moore, *Chota Sahib: Memoirs of the British Raj in India, 1909-1916*. Mss.Eur. D775, page

parties, state dinners, and amateur theatricals—all among an unchanging crowd, the close routine of whose existence has glorified pedantry and killed imagination, who use an esoteric language, and whose conversation is of honors and knighthoods, of jobs and dead men's shoes.⁶²⁴

Edye and his fellow district officers, who did tough it out in the remote districts of India, concluded that men who went to work in the secretariat were no better than sell-outs. They abandoned their true calling of a life of service for one of comfort and the potential for advancement, recognition, and profit. Although, for Edye, these figures believed they would achieve greatness, he argued, “after a year he [the bureaucratic secretary] has lost his sense of humor; after two years he is little more than the butt of a fountain pen; and finally he ceases to have any human value outside his own restricted circle...he deals not with men, but with paper.”⁶²⁵ Another Indian Civil Servant, Robert Carstairs, put it this way

What I have ventured to call the ‘departmental mind’ is a mind in which the quality, admirable in itself, of zeal for the department is so strong that it excludes sympathy, or even toleration, for anything that does not fit in with its ideal... To such a mind, any proposal not originating with the department was likely to be wrong... The mysterious working of the departmental mind seemed to take away their fairness, their humanity, and even their common sense where the interests of the department was in question.⁶²⁶

From this retinue of the ‘departmental mind’—with a very few exceptions—governors were chosen. A look at the résumés of Indian governors tend to bolster Edye’s viewpoint of the ‘snobby office type’ ruling in the colony: Harcourt Butler (1921-1922), William Sinclair Marris (1922-1927), William Malcolm Hailey (1928-1934), and Harry Graham Haig (1934-1937) each served as Governors of the United Provinces and all, prior to their appointment, served in the Indian Secretariat. More than that, not one Viceroy, and three out of nine Governors, came to India with experience of the country and were in Edye’s words, “ignorant of Indian

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Robert Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer*, 310-311.

languages.”⁶²⁷ The remaining six Governors who did have experience in India, Edye argued, were from the provincial headquarters, not the districts. The same was very often also true of governors of the Punjab. In conclusion, Edye decried:

It is from this brotherhood that...provincial governors have always been selected. It is not my intention to suggest that better selections could be made elsewhere. My point is that by reason of character and of their experience the proconsuls, including those who governed provinces after long years of service in India, and who are generally and naturally regarded as authoritative, are not in fact reliable interpreters of Indian aspirations or reliable guides as to the manner in which these should be met.⁶²⁸

The only exception to this standard, according to Edye, was Michael O’Dwyer, who served in India as a district officer for more than a decade before he became the lieutenant-governor of the Punjab in 1919.⁶²⁹ Proudly describing O’Dwyer as a “district man,” Edye labeled him a “tower of strength to the Empire.”⁶³⁰

Related to, but more important than, their so-called snobbery, Edye discredited the viewpoints of most colonial governors because, in his words, “[they] have personal relations with only a very limited class of Indian: a few officials at headquarters, a few legislators (of moderate views), and such others—who must be of high social status...”⁶³¹ Regarding their contact with ‘average’ Indians, though, Edye complained, “[the Governor and Viceroy] are in touch only at third or fourth hand” with the goings on in the country.⁶³² In extremely telling detail, Edye continued:

The basis for instance of a Viceroy's information is a letter, covering perhaps a sheet of foolscap, received once a fortnight from the Chief Secretary of each province. This is a summary of similar letters received by the Chief Secretary from the Commissioners of

⁶²⁷ BLL. E.H.H. Edye Papers, *What about India*, 1930.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Philip Woods, ‘O’Dwyer, Sir Michael Francis (1864–1940)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

Divisions, which constitute a provisional Governor's information. The Commissioner's letter is in turn *based on letters received from his district officers* [the author's emphasis]. As would be expected, the various contents of the original letters are incorporated, stressed, toned down, or omitted in the derivative letters according to the personality of the writers. Viceroys never, and Governors seldom, talk directly to district officers about their charges. It is true that an occasional Governor has tried to ride about the country and converse informally with village people. But in India this sort of thing simply can't be done. The great man must have his entourage. He has been known to out-distance it for a few minutes, thanks to an incautious district officer who mounted him on a fast and hard mouthed horse. But the incident was definitely classed as regrettable, and dealt with as such.⁶³³

It is no wonder, then, that the district officer attained and exhibited so much political influence throughout the British Empire. Ultimately, it was he who controlled the official conversation as it moved both up and down the administrative ladder. As has already been established, when the governor or secretariat handed down orders from above, it was the district officer who determined if, and how, the given policy was implemented within his district. As the examples of Lumley, Carrow, Codigan, and others highlighted, the central administration could do very little to halt the initiatives of administrative officers and were, quite often, left in the dark as the actual happenings in the divisions.

However, Eyde's account provides one with an entirely different, yet equally important perspective on British imperial administration. Not only could a district officer alter, bypass, or ignore upper-level directives altogether without any significant fear of redress, he also controlled most all the information that reached the 'great man'. As Edye outlined, Viceroys and Governors had only minimal interaction with their district officers. The only information they had as to the day-to-day workings of their colony came to them summed up in one to two page briefs; more significantly, these briefs represented a précis of the *district officer's* report. As Edye explained:

⁶³³ Ibid.

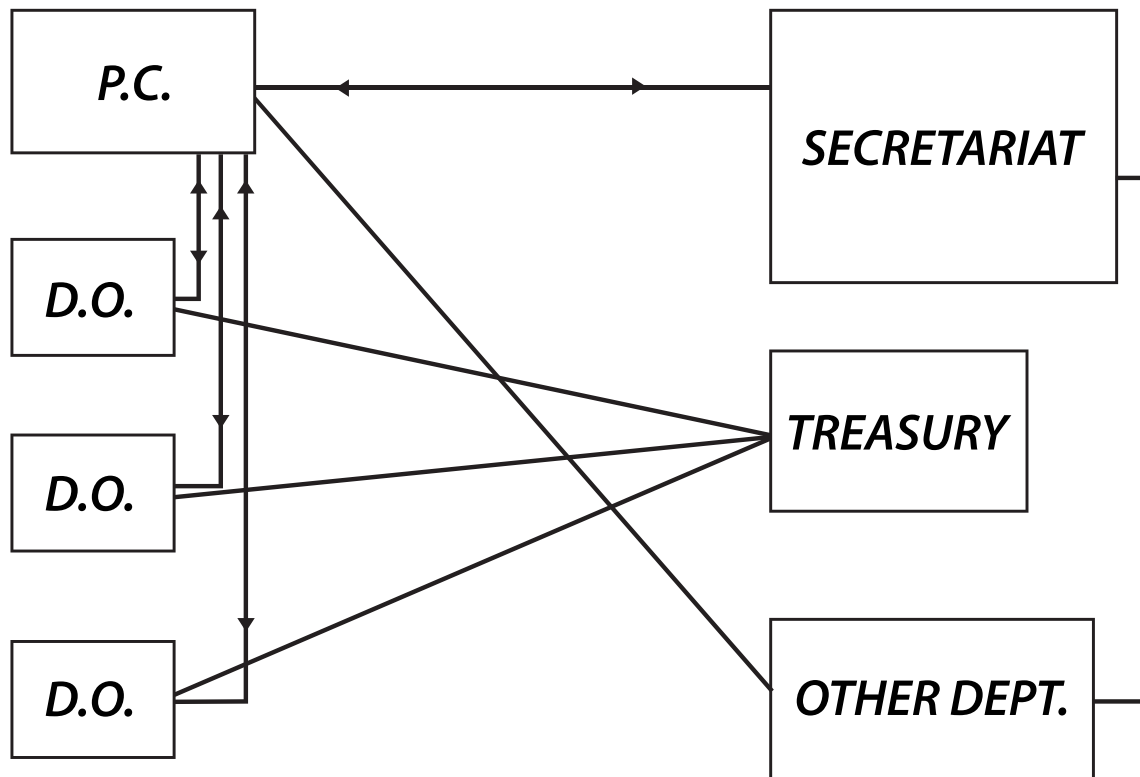
In such an atmosphere, and under the operation of bureaucratic methods of communication, it can readily be understood that what finally reaches the highest official ear is very considerably salted. And the men from whom the Viceroys and Governors see from day to day, and on whom they are compelled to rely for advice—secretaries, heads of departments, and the like—are as much in the dark as themselves.⁶³⁴

Furthermore, not only did the information the governor and viceroy receive come directly from the pens of the district officer, the same was also true for the secretariats that served them.

Take, for example, the information outlined in figure 2.1. The diagram shows the usual channels of communication in Provincial Communication. In almost every matter of importance the district officer was only required to submit his reports to the Provincial Commissioner, who then passed on his own summary of those reports on to Secretariat. The only exception to this included matters of finance. As the district officer was a collector, he corresponded directly with the treasury; otherwise, the district officer sent everything to his immediate superior, the P.C.

⁶³⁴ BLL. E.H.H. Edye Papers, *What about India*, 1930.

Figure 2.1⁶³⁵



These intermittent forms of communication between the literal man on the spot and the central administration at the governor's office left the district officer with a great deal of flexibility. In their constant battle against the whims of the 'great man', over time district officers found that their words carried a great deal of influence and power. Administrative officers found that they had the ability to shape the perceptions of Government House as to the realities on the ground. As B.W. Savory, an assistant district officer in Tanganyika, recalled: "if he [the district officer] had an active pen, he could get away with a great deal."⁶³⁶ As the A.D.O. of Ziyabme district in 1938, Savory took part in an incident that effectively illustrates the civil

⁶³⁵ RHO. Heussler Papers. Notes to Heussler from Frank Longland." October 6, 1965.

⁶³⁶ RHO. Heussler Papers: Notes of Service from B.W. Savory, Assistant District Officer, 1960.

services ability to use a report to shape official opinions—or at the very least mar their understanding. By the 1930s the British imposed in Tanganyika a continually expanding system of indirect rule, which increasingly emphasized the importance of “Local Native Administration.”⁶³⁷ Especially during the years of the governorship of Donald Cameron (1925-1931), there was a collective effort on the part of the colonial government to hand over more and more judicial and bureaucratic responsibility to indigenous authorities. This included the establishment of Native Court and a Native Treasury.⁶³⁸

By 1938, Savory’s district of Zyambe consisted of three Native Treasuries—one in Bena, another in Kinga, and the third in Zangua. While arguably effective in its aims of dispensing a greater degree of native authority, this system created a procedural nightmare for Savory and his colleagues who had to deal with all the extra paper resulting from the existence of three separate departments for only one district. Effectively the current system required work to be performed in triplicate—three estimates of tax revenues had to be compiled; three enquiries into expenditures demanded examination; three sets of books needed balancing; and so forth. Despite their best efforts, Savory and his superiors had no luck in convincing the central administration of the redundancy: “Reams of paper,” Savory remembered later, “had been written [to Government House] attempting to remove this unnecessary absurdity without result.”⁶³⁹ Immensely frustrated with their increase in paperwork, Savory and his Provincial Commissioner finally reached the end of their rope. Fed up, Savory’s P.C. ordered the former simply, “Federate them.” Without question, Savory went on to prepare “not three sets of estimates, but one.”⁶⁴⁰ In

⁶³⁷ Donald Cameron, *My Tanganyika Service*, 75.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ RHO. Heussler Papers: Notes of Service from B.W. Savory, Assistant District Officer, 1960.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

short, on a whim Savory compiled one official estimate for all three treasuries—Bena, Kinga, and Zangua.

The language presented in the report to the Secretariat was very interesting, indeed. Once the estimates were completed, Savory sent them on to his superiors with a note from the Provincial Commissioner, who stated simply that “he had directed the federation ‘after discussions with the [Native Administrations] concerned’.”⁶⁴¹ If read with no other knowledge of the event, the description provided by Savory’s P.C. to the central administration might inspire visions of a bustling baraza hall with chiefs and headmen from all over the district in attendance, diligently weighing the pros and cons of federation. One might at least assume that “discussions with Native Administrations concerned,” would have included a flurry of reports, or meetings, or at the very least, correspondence. Instead, the decision to federate three separate Native Treasuries came on the whim of an overwrought provincial commissioner and his frustrated, yet dutiful assistant district officer.

Savory, like many other district officers in similar positions, knew they had to worry little of retribution or oversight. After all, Savory noted in his correspondence with historian Robert Huessler, “If the said [administrative officer] were stationed in some remote place, the chances of a visit by a superior to examine on the ground the results of implementing the said order would be slight.”⁶⁴² The fact of the matter was that most governors—if they were aware of it at all—at least held the general understanding that they were rarely in control of what went on outside the capital. From the earliest days following the establishment of the colony up to the 1930s the figures at Government House, right up to those in the Colonial Office, understood that,

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

though they might hand out orders to their administrative officers, “they were most often in the position of coordinator and asker for information and advice.”⁶⁴³

Even Lugard, that pillar of strength and resolve so often touted as a paragon of imperial strongmen, was forced to swallow the reality of the independence of his officers.⁶⁴⁴ In his now infamous *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Lugard wrote:

The District officer comes of a class which has made and maintained the British Empire...His assets are usually a public school and probably a university education, neither of which have hitherto furnished him with an appreciable amount of positive knowledge especially adapted for his work. But they have produced an English gentleman with an almost passionate conception of fair play, of protection of the weak, and of ‘playing the game’. They have taught him personal initiative and resource, and how to command and obey.⁶⁴⁵

For all Lugard and his contemporaries might have liked to accentuate their ability to get the district officer to “obey”, the rhetoric—as has been demonstrated—was often far different from the reality. In private, Lugard was much less optimistic about his capacity to control his administrative officers. Although always pre-disposed to centralizing authority in his own hands, Lugard understood that forcing district officers to consult with Government House before taking action would have resulted in administrative gridlock.⁶⁴⁶ It was not feasible, nor was it profitable to expect the imperial philosopher-king to confirm every order and adopt every whitepaper. Lugard admitted that no one knew the “needs” of the people better than the district officer.⁶⁴⁷ Lugard’s successors, Percy Girouard and Hesketh Bell took very much the same approach as their predecessor—to maintain the heir of centralized authority, but to leave much of

⁶⁴³ Robert Huessler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*, 38.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid; Also see, Mary Bull, “Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria, 1906 to 1911” in K. Robinson and F. Madden, (eds.), *Essays in Imperial Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84; Margery Perham, *Lugard II* (London, 1960).

⁶⁴⁵ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, 131-33; also see 133-136.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid, 34-35.

the district work to the literal man on the spot. When Girouard accepted the Governorship of Northern Nigeria in 1906, he came to the territory as a well-known Canadian railway builder and it was principally for that purpose—engineering railways—that he was named governor.⁶⁴⁸

While primarily concerned with engineering, Girouard left much of the administrative work do his provincial commissioners and district officers.⁶⁴⁹

The same approach was also taken elsewhere in British possessions in Africa. Lugard's eventual successor in Nigeria, Donald Cameron, first served as governor of Tanganyika, beginning in 1925. Cameron remembered the condition on his arrival of the administration bluntly, "I found each district officer doing just as he pleased."⁶⁵⁰ As a district officer in Tanganyika, Frank Longland confirmed these protocols, writing after his retirement that Cameron's predecessor, Horace Byat, was happy enough to leave well enough alone. He wrote of Byat: "The Governor through the secretariat accepted the opinion of the man on the spot to a very large extent...and there was very little correspondence."⁶⁵¹ Even in those areas of so-called Indirect Rule, such as Northern Nigeria and Tanganyika the district officer reigned supreme.

Although they were sometimes loathe to admit it openly, many high-ranking officials in Britain and Empire alike at least subconsciously acknowledged the preeminence of the district officer's position in the Empire and just how much the latter actually ran the show. A bevy of former Viceroy, Governors, and High Commissioners occasionally noted the primacy of the

⁶⁴⁸ Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*, 38.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, 38-39; See also RHO. Grier Papers. "Letter to his mother." October 16, 1907. Grier mentioned that he had the opportunity to visit Girouard and that the latter "does not mind discussing things with one and hearing one's suggestions." The governor's willingness to leave well enough alone regarding administrative matters was a welcome surprise to both Grier and Temple-Perkins. For Temple-Perkins impressions of Girouard, see RHO. Mill-Sterling Papers. "Letter to his father." May 1, 1910.

⁶⁵⁰ Cameron to Lugard, 12 September 1925, as quoted in John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 320.

⁶⁵¹ RHO. Heussler Papers. "Responses to questions posed to Frank Longland." April 27, 1965.

colonial civil services. Former Viceroy and Lieutenant-Governor of India, Lord Dufferin once commented:

You ask me to tell you the plain truth regarding the skill, experience, and, in more general terms, the moral worth of the ICS. I reply without hesitation. There is no service like it in the world. For ingenuity, courage, right judgment, disinterested devotion to duty, endurance, open-heartedness, and, at the same time, loyalty to one another and their chiefs they are, to my knowledge, superior to any other class of Englishmen. They are absolutely free from any taint of venality or corruption. Naturally, they are not all of equal worth, and so I am merely speaking of them as a whole. And, moreover, if the ICS were not what I have described it, how could the government of the country go on so smoothly?⁶⁵²

Delivering a speech in India in 1904, Lord Curzon praised the so-called “men in the plains,” whom he touted as the centerpiece of the British Raj. Curzon summarized the worth of the Indian district officer, declaring

Some have come to say that we hold India by the sword; others contend that our Indian Empire rests solely on justice and the eternal moralities. But though the secret of our power is not to be sought in any one phrase, it would be correct to say that the immediate stability and the possibility of our position in India depend on the man in the plains—the practical, common-sense, and hardworking DO.⁶⁵³

The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Leo Amery, added in 1929, “nothing is more vital to the whole development of the Colonial Empire than the men who do the work on the spot.”⁶⁵⁴ In the same breath, Amery went on to declare that “no one who has come into personal contact with the splendid work done by these men [the ICS], especially the district officers, have done in India can do anything but strain the powers of eloquence to find appropriate words equal to the praise they deserve for the work they are doing on our behalf.”⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵² J. Strachey, *An Indian District by a District Officer* (1898), 90.

⁶⁵³ *London Times*. “Indian Affairs.” 8 Aug. 1904: 5.

⁶⁵⁴ Hansard. Leo Amery, HC Deb 30 April 1929 vol 227 cc1389-510.

⁶⁵⁵ Hansard. MacDonald. India Office. HC Deb 05 July 1923 vol 166 cc655-779

Conclusion:

The worldview acquired by a great many district officers in their youth had a tremendous bearing on their approach to imperial administration and, in consequence, on the British Empire. As men who had been trained from adolescence that it would be their lot in life to lead others, they entered into their districts with the utmost confidence in the face of limitless obstacles and endless duties. Considering the scope of their titles and responsibilities, it is no wonder that Furse and his colleagues in the Colonial Office emphasized the recruitment of the well-rounded gentleman into the colonial services. It would be difficult to imagine anyone other than the most indoctrinated product of the Arnoldian education system being capable of serving in an atmosphere as perilous and demanding as the British imperial district. District officers not only had to be physically fit in order to outlast the infinite array of dangers standing before him, but he also had to be mentally resilient against incessant loneliness, isolation, and solitude. To succeed—and even to survive—there could be no limit to their own self-assurance as they consistently stood as the sole representative of the British administration for thousands of square miles, acted as the first line of defense against calamities far and wide, and made life and death decisions on a regular basis.

Their backgrounds, combined with their early experiences in the Empire, deeply impacted the district officer's view of his own identity. Envisioning themselves as the “inelegant maids of all work,” and ‘the men who could get things done’, district officers took personally the responsibility to govern, to administer, and to rule. The implications of such deeply ingrained self-assurance on the official mind were truly momentous. Aided by near constant isolation from any authority figure, district officer's rarely saw any alternative to their own, personal, rule. Who, if not the district officer, would maintain law and order? Who, if not the

district officer, would speak for the people of the district? Who might settle grievances, stave off famine, protect the weak from the strong, and act as mediator between the colonial government and local communities? Engrained with a fundamentally instilled paternalism, these were questions that political officers sought to answer themselves.

The literal man on the spot found both the need and the opportunity for independent, individual, action. Wielding the reigns of authority came naturally to him. He also deemed personal rule to be necessary because of the inadequacy of his superiors. In contrast to how political officers often defined themselves, they viewed the ‘great men’ of Empire—Viceroys, Governors, and the like—as being out of touch. Though these figures may have had similar backgrounds, according to a number of district officers, the nature of their positions prevented most of them from exerting any knowledgeable influence in the colonies. As such, political officers rarely hesitated to chart their own course within the day-to-day administration. In particular, they tended to control the Empire in three fundamental ways.

First, by way of their geographical isolation, district officers had no time (or great interest) in requesting permission from Government house before acting. Innumerable day-to-day and minute-to-minute decisions had to be made without the direct consent of the Governor, Chief Secretary, or even Whitehall. Even the great-men, like Lugard, admitted this privately—it was, perhaps, the unspoken rule of empire. Second, the district officer also typically decided the fate of imperial policies handed down from above. If a political officer deemed a particular policy to be inappropriate for his particular district—or locale within his district—he could and very often did alter (or ignore) government mandates with little to no oversight. Third, district officers controlled the official conversation from the bottom of the administrative hierarchy to the top. Virtually everything that viceroys, governors, high commissioners, and chief secretaries

knew or thought they knew about the districts originated from a briefing of a report passed up the chain of command from the district officer.

IV. *Si monumentum requires circumspice*

*'Tis time to draw in close around the fire
And tell grey tales of what we were
And dream old dreams and faded*

—Charles Henry Harper, Gold Coast, 1914.

Having established in Part II the paramouncy of the district officer's position in the Empire, what remains is to examine the scholarly consequences of this new interpretation. As the literal man on the spot and the pundit of imperial policy, how did the district officer define the British Empire, its methods, motivations, and its effects? First, before answering these questions, it should be noted here that the goal of this section is not to pass judgment on the merits and demerits of empire. Such inquiries are ahistorical, at best. Perhaps no one has commented so astutely on the question of imperial legacies as historian Frederick Cooper who wrote: "It is past time to put away tendentious and abstract claims for and against colonialism, and to look more closely, and dispassionately, at the complexities of the historical phenomenon that was the British Empire."⁶⁵⁶ Instead of taking a 'balance sheet approach' to empire as some historians have done, tallying marks for and against, the aim of this section is to examine the nature of British imperialism as district officers and their colleagues viewed it.⁶⁵⁷ Only in this way can one truly unmask the intricacies of Britain's imperial official mind.

To be successful in this enquiry, one must remove judgmental hindsight and attempt to see colonial administration as imperialists at the periphery conceived it during the time in question. British imperialism as it was manifested at the peripheral level was as much about a state of mind as it was about any other consideration. The few men responsible for determining

⁶⁵⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

⁶⁵⁷ Two of the most notable scholars who have embraced the 'balance sheet' approach to imperial legacies include Niall Ferguson's *Empire* and Kwasi Kwarteng's *Ghosts of Empire*.

British policy at the local level behaved according to a very particular worldview—what Kenneth Bradley called ‘the code’.⁶⁵⁸ The code meant self-sacrifice, it meant embracing authority confidently, turning a blind eye to personal discomforts, and it required a complete devotion to Britain’s imperial mission. The district officer’s understanding of the code emanated almost universally from his background in the public schools and at Oxbridge. Administration, the enforcement of laws, the channels of communication, and virtually every facet of relations between colonizer and colonized were predicated, from the district officer’s’s perspective, on the political officer’s understanding of their moral purpose. Twisted as though their worldview may have been according to modern standards, Britain’s district officers at the high noon of empire had been inundated in a culture that, to them, was entirely sensible, coherent, and universal. Thus, any misunderstanding of this reality likely results in a skewed understanding of the official mind of British imperialism. If one is blindly contemptuous of the British system of administration and its code, one misses the various means by which British colonial civil servants understood and justified their actions in the Empire.

The explanation for this Anglo-centric approach in an age when most histories necessitate a shift away from ‘imperialism from above’ is that no scholar has yet to place the onus of imperial administration on the colonial services as this study has done. If this work is correct in its assertions that the Empire was driven at the peripheral level by a caste of like-minded ‘servant administrators’, then it is imperative that a number of historiographical questions, old and new, be addressed by reexamining the nature of British imperialism through the lens of the Colonial and Indian Civil Services. As an institution, what guiding principles informed the actions, attitudes, and aims of political officers? Did members of the colonial civil services, as an

⁶⁵⁸ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 23.

institution, see themselves as benevolent, paternalistic up-lifters, or was this truly a ruse? In their own minds, were these figures power-hungry authoritarians, or committed—as they might have thought of it—humanitarians. One of the most important questions that looms large over the historiography of British imperialism centers on the perceptions of district officers—what was at the forefront of their minds in the Empire: difference or similarity? To the colonial bureaucrat, what were his biggest regrets and frustrations? What mistakes, if any, do they believe they, as British imperialists, committed? How did they cope with these perceived failures? Most importantly, what bearing, if any, did the Colonial Service have on the existence of an official mind of British imperialism? Each of these questions, in turn, will be addressed in the following sections.

The Imperial ‘Other’:

One of the first and most important questions to consider when taking into account this new interpretation is how did British colonial civil servants view their own Empire? How did they define their place in it and their goals for it? The answer lies, in part, in the near universal practice on the part of district officers of what might be called ‘imperial othering’. For district officers serving in Africa to India and beyond, the true imperial ‘other’ was not the men and women of color for whom they found themselves responsible; instead, it was more often their own European kinsmen whom the district officer looked upon with an inherent assumption of dissimilarity. What distinguished the British district officer from their European counterparts, they believed, was the culture of leadership from which they emanated. As has been established, most district officers were aware of the fact that they had been trained to administer. Their own culture of gentility was the one thing that political officers believed separated Britain from all other European Empires. Administrators highly valued the concept of ‘education for leadership’ even if it did result in what some might call ‘intellectual backwardness.’⁶⁵⁹ Political officers in the Empire may not have attained technical knowledge as such, but they believed they were equipped to act as leaders of society.⁶⁶⁰ The product of their morality-driven training was a belief in the gentlemanly ideal of service-mindedness, incorruptibility, and duty. As one British historian has rightly stated, “the very concept of the ‘gentleman’ in Britain is the “necessary link in any analysis of mid-Victorian ways of thinking and behaving.”⁶⁶¹ Gentlemanly behavior at the height of British imperialism, though, was itself defined by the public school and Oxbridge ethos.

⁶⁵⁹ See for instance, Anthony Trollope, “Public Schools” in *The 19th Century and After*

⁶⁶⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*.

⁶⁶¹ Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, 411.

The institution of service-oriented education was too deeply imbedded in the Victorian psyche to be unhitched in the Age of High Imperialism. Whereas the French system of imperial administration relied heavily on competitive examinations, intellectual prowess, and the ‘cramming’ of knowledge, British administrators and recruiters dismissed such activities as disdainful.⁶⁶² As one authority wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1874

This [the cramming of technical knowledge] is not the way in which the rulers of a nation should be prepared for their great duties. Rulers are to govern...as much by the force of the impalpable qualities, which make up the English gentleman as by mere ability or book learning.⁶⁶³

In short, as a consequence of their educational upbringing British district officers believed that they had something that no other country’s imperial administrators could boast—they had the Arnoldian system; they new the lessons of the Ancients and aspired to learn from the mistakes of past empires; they believed they had learned to subordinate their own interests on the playing fields and through athletic competition; they had confidence that they had been groomed to wield the reigns of authority in the youth of their teenage years. Fair play, integrity, incorruptibility, genuine feelings of paternalism, self-sacrifice—these qualities, they believed, were synonymous with the exclusively *British* spirit of gentility, which they acquired in the hallways of Harrow, Eton, Rugby, and the like. More than race, more than class, more than any other consideration, the district officer drove the British Empire at the ground level with a fundamental belief in his own moral superiority. Political officers’ own conceptions of morality—forged early on in life—fundamentally shaped their worldview and affected how they behaved and how they understood themselves as imperial administrators. Further, the Victorian culture that shaped

⁶⁶² Alice Conkin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 56.

⁶⁶³ *Edinburgh Review* 1874; as quoted in Kirk Greene, *Britain’s Imperial Administrators*, 96.

them also influenced the way they regarded their superiors, and it informed the manner in which they related to those under their charge.

None of this is to say that the British model of service-oriented gentility approached perfection; of course, it certainly was not infallible in any way, form, or fashion. There is no denying that, often times, the district officer misunderstood more than he understood the many complexities of local communities and their respective cultures, habits, and traditions. Mistakes, miscalculations, and errors of judgment were many in the Empire. What must be considered, however, is that infallibility for the district officer was never the point. For instance, in none of their writings, reminiscences, memoirs, or official correspondence did any British district officer, at any time, ever claim to be perfect. In fact, the contrary was more often the case.⁶⁶⁴ In his memoirs, John Rutherford Parkin Postlethwaite commented reflectively on his tenure of service in the Uganda, “We know we’ve made mistakes, sometimes extraordinarily stupid mistakes,” but there was always a desire among servicemen, he said, to “go and do better.”⁶⁶⁵ While most district officers did enter the Empire with a very distinct cultural affinity for the ideas of leadership, service, and paternalism, such feelings did not infer perfection or faultlessness. For Arnold, Thring, and other leading voices of Victorian education, their prefects need not be perfect, but wholly subordinated to the pursuit of moral character. In the Arnoldian system, the shame in failing to do one’s duty would be punishment enough. It is no great secret that countless mistakes were made in the Empire—both acknowledged and unnamed. For all their claims of being the one group who actually *knew* the average people, at times, they could not

⁶⁶⁴ Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 36; John Parkin Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 143; W.M.N. Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule*, 21.

⁶⁶⁵ Postlethwaite, 143.

have been more misguided. Undoubtedly, there were many practical limitations to the effectiveness of qualities of 'Education for leadership' in the Empire.

A particularly cringe-worthy example of the ways a district officer could be out of touch can be seen in the correspondence of L.M. Heaney. Heaney had all the markings of the prototypical colonial civil servant—a product of Oriel College, Oxford, who began his work with the Colonial Service in Tanganyika in 1929 during the twilight of Furse's system of selection. In 1931 his superiors in the Colonial Office promoted him to the rank of assistant district officer and, as a part of his duties as A.D.O., Heaney spent much of the autumn months of 1934 touring his district, holding barazas, and inspecting the overall conditions of the people under his charge. As a part of his touring, Heaney visited local villages with the aim of determining whether or not famine conditions were present. Writing to his mother on November 16, Heaney worried

This famine investigation is rather tricky work as the wily natives are hoping to get free food and are therefore exaggerating madly. I myself have only the haziest idea of how much food a native family requires. If anyone dies of starvation, I get a severe kick in the pants, but if I spend government money on famine relief without good cause, the kick comes also. At the moment I am inclined to think relief will not be necessary.⁶⁶⁶

Here we see a classical example of the typical dilemma in which the colonial civil servant found himself. On the one hand, Heaney's predicament symbolizes yet another case of the district officer's unfortunate position as a Son of Martha, deadlocked against his superiors, damned when he does and damned when he does not. Second, this episode demonstrates an obvious drawback to the British fondness of philistinism. Due directly to his lack of specific training, Heaney admitted flatly that he was ignorant of the exact qualifications of what constituted "famine conditions."

⁶⁶⁶ RHO. Papers and Correspondence of L.M. Heaney. Mss.Afr.s.2271. Box 1. Correspondence 1929-1943. "Letter to his mother" November 16, 1934.

In the very same letter, Heaney asked his mother not to think of him as cold-hearted or to doubt the sanctity of the imperial mission in light of his revelations regarding his attitude toward the native population. He was not purposefully being cold hearted, he said. Instead, he implored her to recognize the challenges consistent with imperial administration. “Unfortunately,” he wrote, “our unsophisticated native will never admit there is a measure of prosperity—for after all he is a farmer and his viewpoint resembles a little an English farmer’s.”⁶⁶⁷ Heaney implored his mother to understand that there were plenty of people in his district looking for free handouts and any opportunity to take advantage of government charity. At one and the same time, he worried about being made to look a fool *and* failing to do his duty. Confidently relying on his own judgment, Heaney’s ‘logic’ proved to be disastrously misinformed. Again in the same letter, Heaney wrote his mother

I have not ben surprised therefore on reaching the famine area to find not skinny scarecrows crawling round in the last stages of starvation but sleek little children with protruding tummies, proudly parading under the village schoolmaster to greet me with shrill and noisy songs, while the tribal women scurried around me making a shrill ululation in salutation.⁶⁶⁸

Through his own ignorance, Heaney failed to understand what was right before his very eyes. The children he encountered in the so-called “famine area” most likely were starving, their “protruding tummies” the result of severe malnutrition.

In another instance of failure in India and Upper Burma two members of the Indian Civil Service, Benjamin Heald and Robert Carstairs, constantly struggled to get a handle on the epidemic of snakebites in their respective districts. For Heald in Upper Burma, the plague of the

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

country was the Russell's viper.⁶⁶⁹ Although the snake was relatively small—only about three to four feet long—according to Heald, “it killed as many people in my district as all the other snakes and tigers and panthers and bears put together.”⁶⁷⁰ The same situation was true also in Carstairs' district.⁶⁷¹ The difficulty was not that the Russell's viper was altogether more aggressive than other predators, quite the contrary. Generally the snake was extremely sluggish, unwilling to move out of the way of an unfortunate passer-by. More often than not, this led to a potentially deadly envenomation. As a result, each man endeavored separately to find a solution to his people's dilemma and curb the snake problem. Somewhat remarkably, both Carstairs and Heald instituted the exact same plan of action. In an effort to put a dent in the population of the Russell's viper, the two officers offered a reward to villagers in their district for every dead snake turned in to them at headquarters.

Over the course of the next several months, both men were astonished at the shocking numbers of snakes brought to them every single day. It appeared to both men that, with each passing week, more and more serpents arrived at their doorstep. As Carstairs recounted in his memoirs, “whole families of tiny creatures just born would be brought [to the district station].”⁶⁷² Shortly, though, both men realized that they had become the butt of an enormous scheme. As Carstairs and Heald soon learned, the villagers of their districts had begun breeding the snakes so to attain the reward artificially. In consequence, both district officers ordered that payment for dead snakes be halted immediately.

⁶⁶⁹ BLL. Benjamin Herbert Heald Papers. “Account of his early days in Burma, 1900-1910.”, page 19.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ Robert Carstairs, *The Little World of a District Officer in India*, 156.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

Although just two examples are noted here, one does not have to look far for more of the same. Numerous studies have pointed out the follies of British administration.⁶⁷³ The reality of their many failures, though, did not escape most administrative servants. What is more significant for this study is the district officer's approach to their many calamities. While supremely aware of their failings, British district officers viewed their struggles in relative terms, in which they compared their own approach to imperial administration with other European empires. Stationed in Northern Nigeria, Charles Orr wrote to a companion as District Resident in 1904,

I do not look upon my own race as perfect, of course. They—we, I ought to say—have a thousand faults of which arrogance and self-satisfaction are probably the worst. But I have travelled a good deal and in strange countries and I have seen the administration of which races by French, Germans, Russians and others and I always fail to find that integrity and love of fair play which every Englishman inherits from his ancestors...⁶⁷⁴

Orr is perfectly clear in his determination that British rule was nowhere near perfect; however, he remained convinced that British rule—with all its values—stood far superior to anything else offered by other European nations. In a separate letter sent nearly two years later, Orr held steadfast to his convictions when writing to a friend in South Africa about the outcome of the Boer War:

I think I must send you a *National Review* with a most interesting article, from the parcel, British point of view of course, of Milner. I think he is honest, fearless, and absolutely just. I am convinced it is a gross libel to say he acted [in South Africa] from ambitious motives or from the desire to serve his country by increasing its territory. The whole question was far, far more deep-seated than that. To let things go on as they were going

⁶⁷³ See especially Benjamin Talton, *Politics of Social Change in Ghana* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Andrew Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanization, Crime, and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam, 1919-1961* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2005); Jocelyn Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe, 1893-2003* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1006); Moses Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Columbus: Ohio University Press).

⁶⁷⁴ BLL. Charles Orr Papers, "Letter to Miss Levisseur." October 30, 1904.

was to see a disease growing and spreading which must have eventually led to the break up of the British Empire.⁶⁷⁵

The implication, he assumed, of the weakening of the British Empire would inevitably result in the advancement of other European Empires. Yet, Orr did not think of this entirely in terms of its effect on Britain itself, but on the indigenous peoples of Africa and beyond. Talking of the possibility of British inaction against the Boers, Orr asked rhetorically,

Looked at from the coldest, most detached point of view, can you say that this would have benefited the world at large, and civilization as a whole? Must you not admit that it would have been a disaster? Would you wish if you were an inhabitant of Mars keenly interested in this world, to see German and Russian influence let us say, substituted for British? Honestly I do try very hard to look at all questions from a non-party point of view. I do consider that the British have a fairer and truer sense of justice and individual liberty of thought and action than any other nation, and it is to this and this alone that I consider is due the British Empire which has sprung up round the tiny little island in the sea. If we lose those characteristics of justice and fair play, not all the fleets and armies in the world can save us, nor should I wish them to. That is the reason why I would gladly devote my life to just keeping alive those qualities.⁶⁷⁶

What Orr dedicated his life to was not the Empire, *per se* but, as he viewed it, the fundamentally *British* qualities that made empire both possible and necessary. In this scenario, Orr determined in his own right which came first—the qualities justice, a sense of fair play, and Britain’s own historical foundations of liberty paved the way for British imperialism, not the other way around. He held that the British character created the Empire; morality was not, to Orr’s mind, a mere justification for imperialism, it was the fundamental cause. In conclusion to the letter, Orr ended by expressing his view that if, indeed, Britain was at fault for her actions in South Africa then certainly she would reap what she had sown. “If to annex the Boer states was a sin and caused by selfish ambition and the greed of gold,” he wrote, “then we shall bore them.”⁶⁷⁷ “How many,”

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

he asked, “of Napoleon's conquests remained to France after 1815?”⁶⁷⁸ Napoleon’s victories did not stand, Orr argued, because they were unjust. In the same way, he maintained, British endeavors would come to naught if her intentions proved to be impure.

In 1911, Orr used his extensive experience of British administration to write what was, at the time, viewed as an authoritative account of British rule in West Africa, which he aptly entitled, *The Making of Northern Nigeria*. At the end of his study, which covered everything from commerce and trade, to the organization of the provinces, to taxation problems and land tenure, Orr summed up his conclusions on the governance of the colony by asking the question, “if we as a nation are called to account for our rule in Northern Nigeria, can we say that we have replaced misrule by good government?”⁶⁷⁹ “Surely,” Orr answered, “the question can have but one answer...Judged by *European standards* [the author’s emphasis], the country is immeasurably better governed than it was before. And, judged by native standards, we can say the same with some confidence.”⁶⁸⁰ As Orr’s reflections demonstrate, district officers often based their judgments about the British Empire against their perceived understanding of the motives and activities of other European empires.

Orr was not alone in his reasoning. John Postlethwaite wrote authoritatively in his memoirs, “We have, and we claim this triumphantly, a cleaner bill of health...than any other European nation...We [the British] have tried to give the native African a square deal.”⁶⁸¹ What is even more significant than this was the fact that many district officers acknowledged the direct connection between Britain’s uniqueness and its public school values. W.R. Crocker wrote of his conviction that Britain’s culture of gentlemanliness stood as the one thing that set it apart

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Charles Orr, *The Making of Northern Nigeria*, 276.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, 276-277.

⁶⁸¹ John Postlethwaite, *I look Back*, 144.

from its European rivals. “It is when one has some first-hand knowledge of French or Dutch or Belgian Colonies,” he argued, “that one comes to realize that this emphasis on the Public School cum Oxford-Cambridge-Sandhurst values is of overwhelming importance as regards British colonialism.”⁶⁸² The difference, Crocker concluded, between British and other European colonial administrators had everything to do with character development. It was a part of the training of the British district officer to make himself concerned with the welfare of his people.

Significantly, Crocker added

The difference between the British on the one hand and the French or Dutch on the other was also shown in the kind of housing and in the general style of living. In French or Dutch Colonies there were no playing fields, no polo, etc. etc. The French Service was the *carriere ouverte aux talents par excellence*. What counted for getting in was to pass a written examination; there was no passing an interview, or a series of interviews, in front of Furse's group, snobbish though some might have thought them.⁶⁸³

For all its faults and failings, Britain's system, Crocker concluded, was inherently unique—Furse, the Oxford dons, and the public schools made sure of that. It was this perception of uniqueness and distinctiveness that characterized the district officer's view of himself and his empire.

A great many others agreed with these sentiments. One British official reported in 1906 on German East Africa that, “The Germans never move off the roads, they don't care for sport, and have no idea of the word as used by the British.”⁶⁸⁴ The things these men held so dear—the games ethic, character, sense of justice, morality, personal contact with the ‘natives’, and so on—were direct manifestations of their own backgrounds. They saw their world through the lens of the schoolhouse. In his own right, Selwyn Grier also perceived matters from this very

⁶⁸² RHO. Heussler Papers. “Letter from W.R. Crocker.” August 16, 1960.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ PRO, WO 106/342 as quoted in Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, 289.

particular point of view. Grier was an ardent conservative who opposed all sorts ‘radical’ schemes ranging from Irish Home Rule, to free trade, to women’s suffrage and, with regard to Empire, all manner of ‘Little Englanders’. Writing home to his family he could be absolutely dogmatic in his opinions and unwavering in his resistance to his ideological counterparts. In particular, one of his gravest complaints against the Liberal Governments that ruled Britain early on in his tenure as a district officer in Northern Nigeria was, as he put it, their apparent aversion to the high monetary cost of Britain’s colonies. “What probably annoys a radical government,” he wrote to his mother in 1906, “is that this country [Northern Nigeria] costs about 200,000 pounds a year.”⁶⁸⁵ To this, Grier complained that there were more important considerations at stake in Northern Nigeria than money.

Of extreme concern to Grier was what might happen to the people of his colony if Britain abandoned its responsibilities simply to cut costs. “If we were to abandon this country,” he continued, “it would pass into the hands of the French, which would be a poor lookout for the people.”⁶⁸⁶ This was true enough for Grier because in his estimation, “the type of French man who goes to the colonies is not much to boast of [*sic*].”⁶⁸⁷ An Oxford man, on the contrary, was in Grier’s words, “extraordinarily capable,” and able “to master the most intricate details.”⁶⁸⁸ To this he added, “all of our leading men in this job are Cambridge men.”⁶⁸⁹ Financial considerations, including burdens on the British taxpayer, were of little to no consequence to men like Grier. Britain’s possession of Northern Nigeria, Grier believed, meant that the colony was in far better hands than it might have been otherwise.

⁶⁸⁵ RHO. Grier Papers: “Letter to his mother.” November 6, 1906.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ RHO. Grier Papers, “Letter to his mother.” March 25, 1916.

⁶⁸⁸ RHO Grier Papers, “Letter to his mother.” October 1, 1907.

⁶⁸⁹ RHO. Grier Papers, “Letter to his sister.” April 28, 1911.

Later, upon the outset of the First World War, Grier addressed his mother's worries as to the effect that the conflict might have on her son's safety in the colonies. In an attempt to calm her concerns, Grier wrote to his mother stating that he expected no significant threat of indigenous uprising in Nigeria. "At a time like this," he wrote, "we have nothing to fear from the native—all of them know what the German is when he has natives to handle and I am sure the whole of the population would rise to support us if the call came and the German tried to come in here."⁶⁹⁰ Three weeks later, he added,

The native here and up north too knows far too much about German methods in the Kamerons and Togoland to give any trouble at all... There isn't much to tell you here. There is no fear of disloyalty in this part of the world, for every native knows that it is a choice between 2 evils, us and the Germans; the latter is the greater of the two.⁶⁹¹

Moreover, Grier believed this outlook to be justified by what he had seen in his own experience as an administrator. He worried about rumors of Whitehall's imperial wartime scheming, especially Britain's dealings with France. Again to his mother, he fretted,

I hear that we are to hand over to the French practically the entire Cameroons! It is really a great shame in some ways, but I suppose it is all a matter of arrangement. The Cameroons natives will be very upset. Before ever war broke out the Duala people were sending messages to us to come and save them from the Germans. The Germans found this out and finally hanged their principle chief. The latter in a speech [he] was allowed to make from the scaffold said 'that the Germans could hang him, but that they could not prevent us [the British] coming and that we would avenge his death'. All his people, when we did come, were convinced we had come because the Germans had hanged their Chief. I am afraid, poor brutes, they will find the French little better than their former masters.⁶⁹²

A.C.G. Hastings, who went out to Nigeria with Selwyn Grier, adopted an entirely similar outlook. In assessing his time in the Empire, Hastings recalled that "there is no race which can beat the British in handling the natives... where we [Britain] score is that we believe in keeping

⁶⁹⁰ RHO. Grier Papers, "Letter to his mother." August 11, 1914.

⁶⁹¹ RHO. Grier Papers, "Letter to his mother." August 25 & 30, 1914.

⁶⁹² RHO. Grier Papers, "Letter to his mother." March 25, 1916.

up the native's end, and helping the 'under dog in the fight'."⁶⁹³ "Meanwhile," Hastings explained

we do nothing which makes ourselves comfortable while we are at it. Nigeria has no towns like Dakar and Konakry in French West Africa, where you find boulevards of shady trees, cafes, gardens, restaurants and picture places... Cheerfully we settle down in homes of mud with another patch of mud to play our games on; we eat rough food and carelessly; we go sick, we die or we recover, and if the gods are good to us we retire holding on to what remnants of health and strength are left to us; but the point is that, taken all in all, we leave the native in a rather better case than when we found him.⁶⁹⁴

Here again, however implied, one can see the ever-present notion of comparative empires.

Another African civil servant, Martin Kisch, a St. Paul's and Oxford alumnus, noted the same in his field diary in Nigeria in 1908. In December of that year, Kisch received orders to make contact with a French colonial administrator also serving in West Africa. The purpose of Kisch's mission was to go and meet his French counterpart and escort him to Nigeria so that the latter could come to the colony to study British administration. At the outset of their meeting, Kisch found a great deal of both humor and disgust in the character traits he observed in his French guest. The entry in Kisch's diary for December 27, 1908 noted his amusement that his French companion adorned himself in a tricolor costume, to which Kisch added sarcastically, "as one might expect."⁶⁹⁵ Having met with one another late in the night, Kisch recalled that the Frenchman "was in an awful funk at my being so venturesome as to go at more than a walk at night."⁶⁹⁶

To Hastings and Kisch, this mindset was precisely what one might expect from French administrators. While they defined the French as exploitative, decadent, deeply concerned with their own comfort, and inherently selfish, they maintained that British administrators fought the

⁶⁹³ Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 249-50.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Martin S. Kisch, *Letters and Sketches from Nigeria*, 125-6.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

good fight, regardless of the personal cost or discomfort. This, to Hastings Kisch, and others, acted as further proof of the integrity and genuine nature of the British imperial mission, compared to that of its competitors. In large part, this mindset is what helped them to justify their own actions and behavior.

Remarkably, Britain's political officers tended to have a hyper-awareness of both similarity and difference—their basis for making a determination one way or the other hinged solely on their perception of one's character. Just as many district officers differentiated between intellectual, 'secretariat types', pompous governors, and those who willingly became the 'Sons of Martha', they also made the same distinction between their own imperial mission and that of other nations. The French, Belgians, Germans, Russians, *et al* each claimed in their own ways to have an imperial mission, but British colonial civil servants judged them to be *different* because, in their estimation, the former lacked the necessary devotion to morality and character-driven administration; they did not have the training. Governors and their secretariats in their own governments were often seen as being *different* because, although they may have had the right background, many of them seemingly failed to embrace the lessons of their training. district officers applied these very same judgments to other European empires.

In effect, throughout both their private recollections and official publications, both during their tenures of service and following their retirement, most district officers were anxious to demonstrate that they, as imperialists, did not exploit the Empire or its peoples in the same manner as other European empires.⁶⁹⁷ Herbert E. Newnham, member of the Ceylon Service in the 1920s and 1930s stated flatly, "if we had [exploited the Empire] I would be living in a

⁶⁹⁷ RHO. Heussler Papers. "Notes on an Interview with Herbert E. Newnham." August, 1949; RHO. Heussler Papers. "Letter from W.R. Crocker." August 16, 1960; Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 22; Sir Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 10; RHO. Heussler Papers, "Notes from A.N. Armstrong, CMG." June 4, 1960.

mansion instead of doing my own housework.”⁶⁹⁸ By the same token, Alan Burns wrote in his memoirs, “members of the colonial services usually die poor which is proof of their honesty, if not their providence.”⁶⁹⁹ In an interview with historian Robert Heussler, W.R. Crocker insisted

Most of the men in Nigeria, for all their eccentricities, worked hard, tried to be benevolent fathers to their native charges, and they undoubtedly won the trust of the great mass of Africans because of their justice, fairness, generosity, and good humor. They rarely, if ever, succumbed to temptations in the way of corruption or even meanness about money. I kept a close eye on Nigerian affairs for about 15 years and I know of only two cases of British officers being involved in corruption cases.⁷⁰⁰

Both during their careers and after, incorruptibility served as a cornerstone element of the district officer’s view of himself.

The fear of corruption stood strong in the minds of district officers like E.K. Lumley. While stationed at Tanga District Office in 1926, Lumley faced what he later called a “very disturbing experience.”⁷⁰¹ The incident to which Lumley referred had to do with the tax books he kept in his possession as a district officer at Tanga. Under the existing system, tax books for each district were held at the district office and contained one hundred receipts in counterfoil, with each receipt having the rate of tax printed on it.⁷⁰² The tax rate for Tanga during Lumley’s tenure was six shillings, meaning that each tax book was equivalent in value to 600 shillings or 30 pounds. When the tax was collected, the original receipt was presented to the payer and the counterfoil remained in the possession of the tax clerk for the government’s record. Twice a month the acting district officer—Lumley in this case—checked the amount of cash returns against the record of receipts. Late one evening while he was completing some of his routine work in his bungalow, a tax clerk reported to Lumley and handed over his cash and tax books.

⁶⁹⁸ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Notes on an Interview with Herbert E. Newnham.” August, 1949.

⁶⁹⁹ Alan Burns, *Colonial Civil Servant*, 10.

⁷⁰⁰ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Letter from W.R. Crocker.” August 16, 1960.

⁷⁰¹ Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 22.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*

Being that it was after office hours, Lumley decided to lock the books and the cash in his own cupboard for safe-keeping until the following day, rather than storing the cash and books in the office safe, as was the typical procedure.⁷⁰³ The next morning, Lumley recalled, “I went to the office for the daily stint, any thought of tax books absent from my mind.”⁷⁰⁴ Overnight, Lumley completely forgot that he had stored the currency and records in his own bungalow. More than a fortnight later, as Lumley worked to complete his annual tax reports, he found that he was several pounds short. His books simply would not balance. Lumley searched his mind until, in horror, he remembered the episode of a few weeks before when he had stored the money in his own bungalow! Frightened, Lumley quietly slipped out of the district office and retrieved the missing tax books and cash. In retrospect he remembered

I brought them back to the office, explained to the clerk what had happened, and together we completed the return. If those books and cash had been found in my possession before I had had the opportunity of returning them, who would have believed my explanation? From this experience I learned never to let government cash enter my private quarters.⁷⁰⁵

While this experience may appear routine—a simple ‘slip of the mind’—Lumley thought it significant enough to include it in his memoirs. Had his mistake been uncovered before he realized what had happened, it might have appeared that he was stealing from the government—or, still worse, from *his* people. To Lumley’s mind, a district officer had nothing if he lost his respectability or his trustworthiness. Such careless actions could needlessly undermine the entire British imperial mission of achieving objective justice and its stabilizing influence.⁷⁰⁶

According to A.F.B. Bridges who served as a district officer in Nigeria during the 1920s, the very reason he decided to publish his official memoir, aptly entitled *So we used to do*, was to

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ RHO. Heussler Papers, “Notes from A.N. Armstrong, CMG.” June 4, 1960.

“set the record straight” with regard to Britain’s imperial mission and to “refute the ‘malicious myth’ of colonial oppression.”⁷⁰⁷ In his retirement, Bridges grew tired of hearing accusations of imperial shame and injustices. To Bridges, the district officer’s job was to lay the foundations of nationhood in Africa without the expectation of either support or even gratitude.⁷⁰⁸ Bridges made no reservations about the fact that he, like many of his colleagues, enjoyed their work, but he also contended, “that it [enjoyment] does not make his [the district officer’s] job any less meritorious or less true to the ideals which subconsciously inspired their work.”⁷⁰⁹ Benjamin Herbert Heald echoed these ideas in a series of lectures given regarding his tenure of service in Burma from 1900 to 1910. In Heald’s view,

The welfare of thousands is committed to our charge and we spend most of our time and the best part of our lives ministering to their health and comfort. We try to improve the sanitation of their towns and villages. We develop their industries. We give them up-to-date hospitals and excellent schools. By means of village and district councils, municipal committees, and numerous public activities, we try to help them on the road towards civilization. Progress is slow, but as the result of 30 years' experience I can say that it is sure, and that in Burma as elsewhere throughout the world, British rule and the services of British officers has made for real freedom and for moral as well as material advancement.⁷¹⁰

At the conclusion of their careers, many district officers felt justified in thinking that their time in the Empire was worthy of their efforts. John Postlethwaite openly admitted that one of his most prized mementos from his tenure of service in Uganda was a letter he received from the Mukama of Bunyoro.⁷¹¹ Postlethwaite valued the letter so much that he felt obliged to include it in its entirety in his memoirs. The letter read:

Sir,

⁷⁰⁷ A.F.B. Bridges, *So we used to do*, vii-viii.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ BLL. Benjamin Herbert Heald, Mss. Eur. D688: Account of his early days in Burma, 1900-1910, pg. 34.

⁷¹¹ Postlethwaite, 118.

On behalf of myself as the head of the Bunroro Native Government and my chiefs and people, I wish to congratulate you for the high office you have attained. We wish you every good success, long life and prosperity.

But on the other hand, Sir, it is with profound regret that we are to part with you. I will always cherish the thought that it was you, Mr. Postlethwaite, who improved my country in a wonderfully small time. You now leave us with good roads, fine camps, plenty of food, cotton and tobacco, better Chiefs, good advice, and many other good things I am unable mentioning here.

Bunyoro owes a debt to your wise guidance and practical interest in every phase of the country's work.

Tito G. Winyi II,
The Mukama of Bunyoro

It is by these types of memories that district officers like John Postlethwaite judged their careers.

Significantly, Postlethwaite ended his autobiography with the following:

Someone has written, 'God gave us a memory so that we should have roses in December.' The retired African Civil Servant will have strange roses in December...best of all—his last memory—an African voice saying, '*Bwana*, don't leave us...' That last memory, if he gains it, will, I think make him feel that his life, even with comparative poverty at the finish, has been better worth having than all the Rolls-Royces in the City of London.⁷¹²

⁷¹² Ibid, 148.

The Golden Rule of Empire—*Sannu, Sannu: Maida Hankali* (Slowly, Slowly: Take Care)

Furthermore, this very particular conception of ‘difference’ and ‘similarity’ can also be used to determine the way that the district officer tended to view the citizens and subjects of the Empire. Just as they drew their conclusions about superiors and fellow Europeans based upon their understanding of morality and the embodiment of gentlemanly characteristics, so too did they define their relationships with the patrons of their district. A common sentiment expressed in the writings and reminiscences of district officers across the Empire was the idea that non-Europeans placed under their charge were simply behind Britain in terms of their civilizational advancement. Undoubtedly, these visions of difference were sometimes couched in fundamentally racial terms. However, the conclusions drawn by the district officers of empire were not typically made based solely on perceptions of racial inequality, but what many political officers deemed to be moral inequality.

Instead of purely racial terms, political officers were far more comfortable viewing their colonial subjects within the paradigm of their own gentlemanly, public school worldview. In fact, Furse intentionally constructed his system of recruitment to help him identify men who had not been blighted by racial prejudice. A leading Colonial Office official and contemporary of Furse, Charles Jeffries, wrote in an official report in 1943 that it had long been the goal of the Furse system to attempt to ensure that the aspiring district officer was free from any potentially harmful prejudice. In his report, Jeffries remarked that the young colonial service recruit “must above all not be infected with racial snobbery.” “Color prejudice in the Colonial Civil Servant,” he wrote, “is the one unforgiveable sin...The European whose prejudices will not allow him to accept them...may be an admirable person, but should seek another vocation.”⁷¹³ Instead,

⁷¹³ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Letter from Charles Jeffries.” October 22, 1960.

Jeffries argued, “he [the colonial servant] must be prepared to regard the people of the colonies as fellow human beings and to deal with them man to man. He must be able to sympathize with their aspirations without appearing to patronize, and to encourage their progress.”⁷¹⁴

As a result of this emphasis, political officers tended to frame their dealings with individuals in the colonies in terms that they could easily understand. In particular, district officers often imposed their own historical understandings of their own country onto the social and administrative structures they found in the colonies. In Northern Nigeria, for instance, Richard Oakley recalled in his memoirs his conviction that African societies were akin to “England in the time of King John,” before “the barons had thrown off the yoke of their king and became independent.”⁷¹⁵ So too did Selwyn Grier view the situation in Northern Nigeria, likening village life in the countryside to “England in the 11th and 12th centuries.”⁷¹⁶ Richard Oakley saw things much the same way, describing the patrons of his district as a people “who less than thirty years ago were in the Middle Ages.”⁷¹⁷

Such interpretations jived neatly with their public school understanding of Britain’s own history as a country that, over the course of centuries, fought a continuous battle against the odious tyranny of would-be Stuart oppressors. As a product of its own past, Britain now had a duty, many believed, to pass on its own particular blend of liberty to groups of people all across the globe.⁷¹⁸ In letters home, Charles Orr wrote that he believed England, from the 17th century, had become a “mother of nations.” He explained to a friend in 1904

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 56.

⁷¹⁶ RHO. Grier Papers. “Letter to his mother” August 15, 1907.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ BLL. Charles Orr Letters, “Letter to Miss Levisieur.” February 17, 1904; BLL. Benjamin Herbert Heald, Mss. Eur. D688: Account of his early days in Burma, 1900-1910, pg. 34; A.F.B.

And to the nations that she [Britain] founded she was to give, not only her blood and her speech, but the freedom which she had won. It is the thought of this which flings its grandeur knows the pettiest details of our story in the past. The history of France has little result beyond France itself. German or Italian history has no direct issue outside the bounds of Germany or Italy. But England is only a small part of the outcome of English history. Its greater issues lie not in the...mother island, but in the destinies of nations yet to be. The struggles of her patriots, the wisdom of the statesmen, the steady love of liberty and law in her people at large were shaping in the past of our little island the future of mankind.⁷¹⁹

Whole generations of Africans and Indians, Orr believed, were now fighting the very same battle England had once fought. To their advantage, Orr concluded, these ‘child’ nations had the benefit of being guided by a country that had experienced it all before. For Orr, Britain served as the benevolent intercessor, the helping hand she never had. Looked at in this way, British conceptions of difference have a much more nuanced meaning. There is no question that British administrators in the Empire viewed societies in the colonies as being different from themselves in the context of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, Grier, Oakley, Orr, and others tended to approach colonial peoples as 11th or 12th century versions of themselves.

As such, district officers very often subordinated the primacy of race, in and of itself, to other considerations of similarity and difference. In purely human terms, district officers were far more likely to look for comparisons between the Empire and places they were familiar with, than not. The element of difference was still prevalent, but expressed in moral and developmental, not exclusively racial, terms. For example, when writing home to his mother in March of 1913, Grier debated the true distinctions between religious practice in Nigeria and those of the Roman Catholic Church:

I never quite grasp the point of view of the ultra High-Church people... they seem to me to make essentials of external and unimportant details... I can't understand intelligent

Bridges, *So we used to do*, vii; J. Strachey, *An Indian District by a District Officer*, 89; Owen Thomas, *Stray Leaves from my East African Diary*, 10-11.

⁷¹⁹ BLL. Charles Orr Letters, “Letter to Miss Levisseur.” February 17, 1904.

people going that way. I have never been able to understand the difference between the state of mind of a Nigerian pagan who makes a representation of his god and sacrifices to it and that of an Irish peasant who burns candles...before an image of a saint.⁷²⁰

In a similar line of thinking, another district officer who served in Somaliland in the 1920s likened the Somali people to the “Irishmen of Africa...volatile, handsome, and intelligent... They can show great loyalty to an individual they respect, though they react violently against insult or injustice.”⁷²¹ In trying a murder case in January of 1910, Grier wrote to his sister, “it was a case very typical of the tribe, but I am not sure it might not just as easily have happened within a mile of Piccadilly.”⁷²²

In an especially telling example, Kenneth Bradley recalled in his memoirs an encounter he had with a young African man in Northern Rhodesia. While in the midst of his daily routine one morning, Bradley was approached by a young man who said that he wished to confess to an especially egregious crime. “What have you done?” Bradley asked. “I have killed three men and the Government must hang me, the man responded.”⁷²³ Clearly taken aback, Bradley escorted his new prisoner into the district office to get the details. “Come in to the office and tell me,” Bradley said. As the two men sat down together, the culprit told Bradley, “I killed three men, who were brothers, because they had all raped my sister. That is all.”⁷²⁴ After a long discussion, in which the man admitted to Bradley that he had killed his sister’s attackers by poisoning their food, Bradley finally asked, “why did you have to kill?”⁷²⁵ “You see,” the man responded, “if I had not killed those men, the spirits of my fathers and uncles who live in the tree tops near our village would have brought death on me and my wife and all my children because I

⁷²⁰ RHO. Grier Papers. “Letter to his mother.” March 24, 1913.

⁷²¹ RHO. Heussler Papers. Box 1 “A D.C. in Somaliland.”

⁷²² RHO. Grier Papers, “Letter to his sister.” January 27, 1910.

⁷²³ Bradley, *Once a District Officer*, 76-77.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

should have betrayed the honor of our house.”⁷²⁶ Rather than responding by making some kind of disparaging remark about the idiocy of the man’s action, Bradley admitted that the event caused him commit to a great deal of self-reflection over the following days. “If I had been he,” Bradley wrote in his memoirs, “I should have been faced with the same terrible alternatives of death by the rope or by vengeance of the spirits.”⁷²⁷

Time and time again, political officers looked for comparisons between colonial civilizations and their own history as a part of the British nation. As a part of their understanding of this process of development, many political officers determined that it was only to be expected that non-European civilizations would progress slowly through the various phases of their development. After all, it had taken Britain centuries in her own right to achieve the liberties that Britons now held so dear. Why then, they sometimes asked, would one expect that it might be a good idea—or even possible—for colonial societies to progress more quickly? In specific instances where political officers deemed that changes were happening far too fast, such as with the India Act of 1919, there was inevitably a great deal of blowback by the district officer. The India Act of 1919 was an incredibly controversial piece of legislation within the Indian Civil Service, as it established a diarchy in the provinces of India, wherein increased authority was placed in the hands of local assemblies.⁷²⁸ In short, the Act was intended to expand the participation of Indians within the activities and decision-making of the Raj. In the context of the constitutional transformations that took place in India after 1919, one member of the ICS, Robert Cleese, explained his hesitancy for reform this way:

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ BLL. Mss.Eur D714/5: Memorandum on the effect of the reforms from the D.O.’s point of view, see especially the report compiled by district officer, W.C. Dible, posted January 18, 1928. Dible’s claims of being generally representative of other district officers in India are supported by Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 122-23.

...As far as I am aware, there was no radical change in the administrative machine for local administration in England from the Tudor period up to the 19th century, and this was the period consisting of 300 years, during which the system of Government in England was changed from benevolent autocracy to a system of Government controlled entirely through a democratic parliament. It was only after the system of Parliamentary government had been established finally as a result of 300 years experience, that a radical change was made in the system of local administration.⁷²⁹

At one and the same time, Cleese's statement illustrates his tendency to compare India with Britain's own past, while also demonstrating what Richard Oakley termed as the golden rule of empire: *Sannu, Sannu: Maida Hankali* [Slowly, Slowly: Take Care].⁷³⁰

Cleese and Oakley were far from being the only figures in the colonial civil services to impart these sentiments. Writing to his sister Grier laid out his views on the advancement of colonial peoples in no uncertain terms. "One can't impart western highly civilized ideas wholesale into a country like this, or expect these people to conform to our own ideas of honesty," he wrote; rather, "the slower but surer method is better."⁷³¹ To this, he added,

So few people realize that above all in Africa any work to be lasting must be gradual. One cannot rush the primitive native into a new faith, a new outlook on life, and expect to be able to convert him into completely cutting himself aloof from the traditions, habits, and superstitions that have marked his race for ages. $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile an hour is a desperately fast pace for the African...and it is very hard to remember it always.⁷³²

Striking the very same tone, Orr wrote to Grier in September of 1907 that patience was the most important principle of imperial administration:

As you say, the work itself is bound to make anyone worth his salt keen. But the root principle I have always aimed at since I first came out is first to find out the native's point of view, what he is aiming at, what pleases and what displeases him, and then accepting his customs and habits as the basis, gradually take up bit by bit everything that seems bad, test it, see if it really is bad in its essence, think out carefully whether it can be changed for the better plan which the natives will understand and accept and then (but not

⁷²⁹ BLL. Mss.Eur D714/5: Memorandum on the effect of the reforms from the D.O.'s point of view.

⁷³⁰ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 290.

⁷³¹ RHO. Grier Papers, "Letter to Dorothy." September 25, 1907.

⁷³² RHO. Grier Papers, "Letter to his mother." Undated, 1907.

until then) alter it. But I always want to gain over to my side the sympathy of the native before making a change—to get him to see it is sound and necessary. Of course, sometimes this is a counsel of perfection and quite impossible to carry out...But one wants to remember that most golden of rules for political dealings in this country: GO SLOW!⁷³³

Orr and Grier were on precisely the same page when it came to these interpretations. Grier worried that the British Government often lost sight of the reality of the imperial program. So often, he maintained, men came to the Empire as servants of the Government expecting to make an immediate and lasting impact. “What is twenty years, after all,” ACG Hastings asked following his career in Nigeria? So convinced was he that change in Africa was to be a generational transition, Hastings concluded that he would never see, in his lifetime, Britain’s imperial goals fulfilled. Although he personally would not be able to see things through to the end, Hastings determined that it would be far better to “stay awhile, consolidate, be sure of the ground, giving Nigeria time to swallow and digest, before it starts upon another course of food which is so new to it, and give ourselves a foothold for the next step forward.”⁷³⁴ Striking almost the exact same tone, Grier explained these ideas this way to his mother:

The great idea of so many men is, ‘I have been here so many years, what have I got to show for it?’ with one eye, especially in the case of the government, on the British public and on the opinion of the people at home who after all know nothing about it. It is not the extent of the changes which we bring in that should be looked at, but the durability of the work done. There is far too much rush about much of our policy, we forget that babes have to be fed on milk and...are not fit for strong meal at once.⁷³⁵

This concept of ‘child’ development is a theme that is frequently found within the unofficial papers of political officers. John Postlethwaite added in his own views of African development that,

⁷³³ RHO. Grier Papers, “Letters from Charles Orr.” September 18, 1907.

⁷³⁴ Hastings, 66.

⁷³⁵ RHO. Grier Papers, “Letter to his mother.” October 1, 1907.

I have never seen any reason to jettison the opinion that I then formed that the essence of our dealing with the African should not be based on the view that he is merely a hewer of wood and a drawer of water; and equally that we are not merely his white brothers but are very definitely his white friends and guides; and that if any relationship at all is to be expressed, he is not our black brother, but that we are rather his white fathers or uncles. My own experience is that the black brother school of European thought is looked down upon by the African of any worth, and the holders of that idea seldom obtain genuine acceptance of their leadership or their advice. It is so natural. No boy has ever yet enjoyed a brother's control or advice, but most decent boys will react to a father or to an uncle's guidance, if they feel that this is in fact in their real interests.⁷³⁶

Like Grier and Postlethwaite, Richard Oakley also likened the societies of colonial peoples to growing children:

As the food of a grown man should not be given to a child before he can digest it and appreciate its finer flavors, so it is that the knowledge and progress of a comparatively highly developed race should not be thrust upon a less advanced people too hurriedly; but the tutored race should be guided slowly—very slowly—along the desired lines, so that it can assimilate in a few hundred years what it has taken two thousand years for its master to learn. For a surfeit undigested will assuredly produce sickness. An appreciation for the finer flavors of life...will not be born in a generation.⁷³⁷

According to his own historical understanding, Oakley's statements were not racially based; rather, he perceived them as a matter of logic. Colonial peoples were 'child-like', he reasoned, in the sense that they were civilizationally immature. Britain's own journey toward civility and modernity, he concluded, had taken far longer than a handful of generations.⁷³⁸ To the above, Oakley added, "so it is here where we have to take care—to see that the material progress does not too far outstrip the moral uplift."⁷³⁹ A.F.B. Bridges added of his experiences in Africa, "they [political officers] never forced the pace of progress beyond the digestive capacity of the people...quietly conditioning them to the advantages of Western Civilization."⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁶ Postlethwaite, 38-9.

⁷³⁷ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 290.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁰ A.F.B. Bridges, *So we used to do*, vii.

In India, these types of sentiments also represented the standard approach toward administration. According to one veteran member of the ICS who anonymously published a work entitled *Reform and Progress in India* in 1885, the “energetic type” of administrator should be avoided in recruitment for the services. By this, the serviceman meant an individual “steeped in what may be called ‘progress-at-any-price’ principles...”⁷⁴¹ This sort of man, the author warned, “has little sympathy for the governed; they are too often to him but the *corpus vile* of an endless series of experiments.”⁷⁴² The energetic type of man, the author continued, devoted all of his “energies to either the collection of acts, the manipulation of figures connected with every conceivable subject under the sun, or else to forcing a highly conservative people into grooves prepared by an unbending and not too well informed bureaucracy.”⁷⁴³ At one in the same time, one can see the ever-present rejection of the ‘intellectual types’, prevalent in the imperial services and how some district officers related this type of behavior to the dangers of attempting to bring about too much change in the Empire, too quickly. The author’s answer to this problem centered on his conviction that Britain needed to take its time with its Empire. “Useful work,” he added, “must be intelligent...and has to be judged of by its results.”⁷⁴⁴

Once again, a direct line can be drawn from these conclusions in the Empire back to the public schools and the ideals of education for leadership. Not only did the impetus on slow progression of civilizations stem from Britain’s own understandings of its constitutional history, but ideas on development were also implemented based on the lessons of the Arnoldian system. At Rugby, for instance, Arnold emphasized the importance of developing leadership qualities in boys slowly and steadily. As he revolutionized the British public school system in the mid

⁷⁴¹ Anonymous, *Reform and Progress in India*, 111-12.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

nineteenth-century, Thomas Arnold wrote that “impatience” regarding the development of boys stood as “one of the diseases of the age.”⁷⁴⁵ “Men,” he continued, “are not contented with sowing the seeds unless they can also reap the fruit; forgetting how often it is the law of our condition that ‘one soweth and another reapeth’.”⁷⁴⁶ Arnold was absolutely convinced that human progress was evolutionary—in short, he argued, development took time. While at Rugby Arnold wrote,

It is no wisdom to make boys prodigies of information; but it is our wisdom and our duty to cultivate their faculties each in its season, first the memory and imagination, and then the judgment; to furnish them with the means, and to excite the desire, of improving themselves, and to wait with confidence for God's blessing on the result.⁷⁴⁷

One might say, then, that Arnold’s golden rule of education at Rugby translated directly in to the golden rule of Empire that Orr, Grier, Oakley and others carried into their districts. Waiting was a part of the process. Each season had to run its course within a young boys development. As integral as all the other lessons of the public school ethos were to young district officers who set about for the Empire, it is no wonder that this principle also carried significant weight in the colonies.

It is remarkably striking to read the works of leading British educators in the Victorian Era, then comparing them with the conclusions drawn by colonial administrators in the Empire. Without the proper background information, sometimes the two are nearly indistinguishable. Take, for instance, Arnold’s own explanation of his school system:

Impatience of inferiority felt by a child towards his parents, or by a pupil towards his instructors, is merely wrong, because it is at variance with the truth: there exists a real inferiority in the relation, and it is an error, a fault, a corruption of nature, not to acknowledge it.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁵ Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, 358-362.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid, 356.

Edward Thring's ideals were quite the same in many regards. On the issue of fagging, he wrote:

No fagging means lodging much power in the clumsy hands of "big stupid boys", rather low in the class. Might is the law of such a society. But might is the law of savages. A school with no legal form of fagging is reduced to the level of a savage tribe, and no boy can consider himself safe as long as there is a stronger arm than his own in it...But a legal system of fagging at once dethrones these clumsy tyrants, makes them servants instead of masters, carefully guards against promiscuous slavery, and removes the bitterness of injustice from the exercise of such power as remains. In fact, it is the law of a civilized nation as contrasted with the 'might makes right' of savages. No fagging means no law.⁷⁴⁹

The Victorian understanding of good government was born in the Arnoldian public school system, and the purest products of that system acted as the administrators of the Empire. The Victorian school system also provided the justification for the benevolent autocracy practiced by political officers and civil servants in the Empire. The prefectorial system itself was one of benevolent autocracy, wherein boys of solid character were placed in complete charge over younger—they might have said less advanced—boys. As Arnold put it, it was critical to acknowledge the necessity of the prefect system because there existed a true inferiority in the relationship between older, more experienced boys, and the younger. The school system was, in and of itself, inherently paternalistic and these exact same conceptualizations informed the actions of political officers in the Empire.

If not for a few context clues, it might be assumed that the above statements had been made in reference to the system of colonial rule. Thring's hypothetical example of the public school without the prefectorial system is akin to many administrators' views on the Empire without the guidance of the district officer. It can be assumed therefore that contemporaries might have considered it gospel to say that the Empire without the British civil servant equated to the public school without the prefect. It led to exploitation of the weak by the strong. district

⁷⁴⁹ Thring, *Education and School*, 265-266.

officers viewed their duties in precisely these same terms. In the midst of his career, an Indian district officer wrote of the British system of government in India

We have now, perhaps, said enough to show the extreme importance of the DO, the multifarious nature of his duties, and the caution necessary to him in his performance of them. As we have before remarked, he has to learn the duties of a sovereign, to remember the three-fold functions of Government, as the preserver of order, the guardian of health, and the protector of the 'weak against the strong' ...⁷⁵⁰

To compare this description of the district officer to Arnold's prefect is striking. Arnold wrote of the ideal prefect: "...their business is to keep order amongst the boys; to put a stop to improprieties of conduct, especially to prevent that oppression and ill-usage of the weaker boy by the stronger."⁷⁵¹

As a result of this understanding of their duties, political officers looked upon their role as the intercessor. They were the imperial 'head boys' and saw themselves as educators in the very same light as their own schoolmasters. Postlethwaite wrote of the intimate connection between the public school and the Empire:

Our African child races want leaders, men who know how to govern and command respect as well as affection, and therefore our friend, the candidate [for the colonial services], will, I hope, be able to produce letters from his public school to show that, as a prefect or monitor, he was able to rule in the little world of school, as he will be expected to rule in some far-away African district.⁷⁵²

"Small wonder," another district officer wrote "that a handful of men who had this schooling could keep the *Pax Britannica* right round the world over the teeming millions of the old Empire with justice and mercy as well as they did."⁷⁵³ ACG Hastings added to this that

Those who trouble to think it out, in all its bearings...will see that the policy must vindicate itself in time. For the passing years are showing that as little by little the native rulers understand us and our ways, begin to give opinions, exert intelligence, and get

⁷⁵⁰ Anonymous, *Reform and Progress in India*, 124-5.

⁷⁵¹ Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, 362.

⁷⁵² Postlethwaite, 147.

⁷⁵³ Bradley, *Once a D.O.*, 15.

ideas, prove themselves, in fact, as men who find the old intrigues and roguery do not pay, and new methods of integrity do, so they are being given more and more scope and trust; guidance takes the place of orders, and we who said “do this, do that” in the early days can see them now acting on their own initiative, and understanding why the act is good... The rule is there, of course it must be, but it is the rule that educates, not tramples down or scourges the governed.⁷⁵⁴

This was the essence of the British system of imperial administration, and one that is repeated over and over again in the writings and reminiscences of innumerable district officers. This type of thinking also characterized the Furse system of recruitment and it explains, again, why Furse looked to certain groups of men, from certain schools, to act as the prefects of the Empire. One contemporary wrote of Furse that he was “inspired, determined, and convinced.” He was a “forceful man of firm opinions,” who “did not do things frivolously or in a way that was ever other than purposeful. He knew what he was looking for and why and he went at it relentlessly the whole time he was in charge of recruitment.”⁷⁵⁵ Furse looked for his imperial prefects; he found them; and these men shaped the very nature of the British Empire.

⁷⁵⁴ Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 59-60.

⁷⁵⁵ RHO. Heussler Papers. “Notes from a meeting with A.D. Garson.” July 27, 1960.

The Curse of the Motorcar:

As much as the old guard of district officer might have hated it, times began to change with the opening of the third decade of the twentieth-century. Slowly, the traditional weight given to the key elements of philistinism and the public school ethos gradually gave way to a greater emphasis on intellectual aptitude and technocratic knowledge.⁷⁵⁶ Whereas, in the words of historian Anthony Kirk-Greene, the early district officers of the teens and twenties were “self-reliant, self-confident, [and] often a law unto themselves,” a new breed of administrator was born in 1930s.⁷⁵⁷ The transition in the Colonial Office did not come all at once, but in stages beginning around 1926. In that year both Oxford and Cambridge introduced a year-long introductory training series, termed the Colonial Administrative Service course, for cadets who gained entrance into the colonial services. Beginning in this year, after being commissioned into the imperial bureaucracy, the Colonial Office placed its newest appointees on probation and required them to complete the above-mentioned training program before they could receive their assignments in the colonies. As a part of the curriculum, men learned far more about native customs, language, religion, law, agricultural practices, engineering techniques, and so on than someone like Frank Hives would have ever dreamed was possible when he set off for Nigeria early in the 20th century.

⁷⁵⁶ Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, see especially, 11-14. Here, Greene explains, “‘If ‘fire in their bellies’ had often been a feature, at times almost a qualification, of the founding [early] Dos, from the 1930s intellectual competence and personal empathy were prized attributes in the final model of the DO in Africa.”

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

With the onset of this new requirement, it became clear to many that the days of the amateur were coming to an end.⁷⁵⁸ As an influential figure in the recruitment of the colonial services, Charles Jeffries explained

...I think there was a change as the years went on in the 'image' of the ideal administrative cadet. In the 1920s, the emphasis was on personal character, leadership, and so forth, but at that time there were also distinct 'secretariat' vacancies, for which a more literate type of chap would be thought suitable.⁷⁵⁹

Thus, in the first quarter of the twentieth-century, there still existed in the Colonial Office an emphasis on the well-rounded, public school gentleman. Ralph Furse and his companions generally regarded that only this type of man had the makings of a political officer; by contrast, colonial recruiters reserved the relatively comfortable secretariat jobs for the 'intellectuals'.⁷⁶⁰ However, within ten years, Jeffries contended, "the 'good honors degree'" criterion came to be established.⁷⁶¹ In short, with the changes of the 1930s came a revitalized emphasis on the intellectual; rather than solely attempting to identify men of sound character, the Colonial Office began seeking out individuals with specialized skills. Where previously the district officer found himself responsible for everything from agriculture and irrigation to native laws and customs, the Colonial Office sought after new breeds of administrators who had a degree of expertise in a single craft or field.

The true turning point for the Colonial Service came in 1930 with the publication of the Warren Fisher Report. At that time, the chairman of the report committee, Sir Warren Fisher, acted as the permanent secretary to the Treasury. He was approached by the British colonial secretary, Lord Passfield, to assemble a report that would inspect "the existing system of

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ RHO. Heussler Papers, "Letter from Charles Jeffries." October 22, 1960.

⁷⁶⁰ [RHO]. Papers of Sir Ralph Furse: MSS.Brit.EMP.s.415. Box 1. "Minute on the quality of the CS" 1921.

⁷⁶¹ RHO. Heussler Papers, "Letter from Charles Jeffries." October 22, 1960.

appointment in the Colonial Office and in the Public Service of the Dependencies not possessing responsible government...”⁷⁶² In other words, the primary purpose of the report was to consider existing recruitment strategies for the colonial services. This was clearly a direct challenge to the current system of selection operated by Furse and his staff. Since his appointment as the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1929 the socialist, Labourite, Lord Passfield, was bent on reforming the Colonial Office. Naturally, Furse reasoned that change was likely in the air.⁷⁶³ Recalling an earlier meeting with Passfield, Furse remembered his disgust when the former announced to him “The only true university in England is the London School of Economics [which Passfield helped co-found]. Oxford and Cambridge are only glorified high schools: you cannot teach anywhere except in the lecture room.”⁷⁶⁴ It would perhaps be a monumental understatement to point out that Furse took great offense to the jibe, considering the latter’s own well-documented admiration of Oxbridge principles.⁷⁶⁵

In brief, the Warren Fisher report recommended a new, more systematized approach to recruitment for the Colonial Service. In the words of historian Anthony Kirk-Greene

Where the most positive and far-reaching emphasis of the Warren Fisher Committee lay was in the area of Colonial service recruitment and staff questions. While acknowledging that the Colonial Service clearly benefited from a principle of recruitment that favoured [*sic*] those personal qualities—generally subsumed under the elusive but recognizable rubric of ‘character’, held to be of such prime importance in overseas relations—over those assessable by a written examination, the committee found that the current recruitment system based on officially recognized patronage could not be considered satisfactory and required a thorough reconstruction...⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶² Hansard. Leo Amery, HC Deb 30 April 1929 vol 227 cc1389-510.

⁷⁶³ Furse, *Aucuparius*, 234.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁵ See Part I. Furse was an alumnus of Eton and Oxford and, as has been established, perceived these ‘great schools’ as the primary source of Britain’s ablest gentlemen.

⁷⁶⁶ Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service*, 31.

To summarize, although the Warren Fisher Committee did not claim to reject the traditional emphasis that had been placed on ‘character’ in the recruitment to the colonial civil services, their report also stated that the existing system of selection could no longer be accepted. In essence, the Fisher Committee dismissed the recruitment practices of the Colonial Services of the previous quarter-century as being an outdated and blatant form of patronage, especially revolting to Britain’s leading socialist party. The report itself stated

The evidence we have received from the Governors and senior officers of the Colonial Services, especially in Tropical Africa, leaves no room for doubt that the present method of selection has satisfied these authorities. There is, indeed, abundant proof that the standard of selected candidates has in recent years steadily improved. The work of your present Private Secretary, Major Furse, and his staff is held in the highest esteem by the Colonial Governments.⁷⁶⁷

However, the report continued, “We cannot escape the conclusion that, if seriously challenged, such a system [of recruitment] could not in theory be defended.”⁷⁶⁸ It couldn’t be defended because, as some had begun to grumble, the process of selection appeared too arbitrary, and too elitist. After all, Furse himself admitted that his selection of candidates was done principally through intuition.⁷⁶⁹ In the end, he had little ammunition to defend against the report’s claims. With the Furse method, there were no easily definable set of rules, or qualifications, or standards with which one could identify why certain men were selected for service and others rejected. When challenged on this point by the Warren Fisher Committee, Furse defended his methods—as only a public school product could have—with an allegory. Furse likened the selection of good candidates to the choice of horses:

If you asked me to buy you a hunter at Tattersall’s and told me your weight, the price you would pay, and the country you were going to hunt over, I should probably be able to buy

⁷⁶⁷ *Warren Fisher Report*, 1930, as quoted in Furse, *Aucuparius*, 240

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁹ Furse, *Aucuparius*, 231-2.

you a pretty good horse for your money but I might find it difficult to explain why I bought that horse rather than another.⁷⁷⁰

Led by Passfield, many in the government rejected Furse's stance and started to argue that "new conditions in the colonies required a new type of administrator with 'special attainments...not previously to be found in the Colonial Service.'"⁷⁷¹ It is worth noting that only one member of the Warren Fisher Committee had, at any time during his career, served in the colonial civil services. Otherwise, the delegates assembled were M.P.s, experts on agriculture, representatives of the treasury, and one former colonial governor—Hesketh Bell!⁷⁷² In short, the future of colonial service recruitment in 1930 was left to a handful of men who would have likely been completely discredited by the literal 'man on the spot'.

The changes following the report's adoption were significant. Charles Jeffries considered the final product, Fisher's completed report, to represent nothing less than "the Magna Carta of the Colonial Service," as well as the starting point for the birth of the modern civil services.⁷⁷³

Kirk-Greene explained that following the publication of the report

A new personnel division was created under an assistant undersecretary to coordinate and handle all questions of Colonial Service recruitment, promotions and discipline, hitherto the responsibility of the office's general department.⁷⁷⁴

Henceforth, selection was to be based less on Furse's traditional 'animal tracker' method of the one-on-one interview; instead, in the future, the newly established personnel division ensured that more weight would be given to exam scores, honors degrees, and the completion of training courses.

⁷⁷⁰ Furse, *Aucuparius*, 233-4.

⁷⁷¹ *Warren Fisher Report*, 1930, as quoted in Furse, *Aucuparius*, 240

⁷⁷² Hansard. Leo Amery, HC Deb 30 April 1929 vol. 227 cc1389-510.

⁷⁷³ Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Empire and its Civil Service*.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Further, the very same year that the Warren Fisher Committee published its findings, a third monumental watershed moment overtook the Colonial Office. In June, Lord Passfield, made two landmark announcements. First, in addressing the delegates at the Colonial Office Conference, he proclaimed that the government had accepted the suggestions made in the Warren Fisher Report, meaning all of its recommendations regarding colonial recruitment would be put into place.⁷⁷⁵ Second, and equally as significant, he declared the unification of the Colonial Services into one body. Whereas, before 1930, there had been many, independent colonial services, Passfield noted that there would now be one, unified Colonial Service for all of the territories under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office.⁷⁷⁶ Practically, this meant that unification of the services would have the effect of standardizing recruitment, training, salaries, pensions, transfers, and a whole myriad of other departmental considerations. Unification also provided, for the very first time, that all colonial bureaucrats would be qualified for transfers to any vacancy within the Colonial Office's authority. In consequence, it would now be possible, for example, for a district officer serving in Nigeria to request a transfer to a different post in another colony.⁷⁷⁷

Although the changes of 1930 did not entirely eliminate the traditional emphasis on character, the importance of the public school, the Oxbridge graduate, or the purposeful selection of candidates—Furse made sure of that—they did signify a fundamental change to the nature of the old system. Even though he remained on staff in the Colonial Office as an Assistant Secretary of Appointments, Furse referred to the effects of the reforms as “the clipping of my

⁷⁷⁵ Furse, *Aucuparius*, 239.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁷ Kirk-Greene, *On Crown Service*, 33.

wings.”⁷⁷⁸ Much as he may have been dismayed at the revisions enacted following the publication of the Warren Fisher Report, Furse held out hope that his system of recruitment would not be entirely altered. After all, the Fisher Committee made clear that it had no intention of severing all ties with Furse’s character based approach—and as of yet, Furse had established the most successful system yet devised for identifying men considered to be of the ‘right sort’.⁷⁷⁹ However, Furse’s continued involvement in the Colonial Office and his persistent commitment in pursuing first the qualities of character, have wrongfully led some historians to conclude that the changes instituted by the Warren Fisher Committee were not radical or damaging to the traditional recruitment efforts of the colonial services.⁷⁸⁰ By 1932, Furse and his system garnered considerable resistance on a number of different levels. The impact of the reforms are especially apparent when looking at the reactions from the district level, and prove that the outcome of the Warren Fisher Report was nothing less than a complete watershed moment in Britain’s imperial administration.

By the time of the publication of the Warren Fisher Report, trouble in India—as the district officer saw it—had already begun. Changes in India had less to do with organizational restructuring, as had been the case in the Colonial Office, and more to do with the changing political climate within India itself. By 1935, members of the Indian Civil Service long felt as though they had been fighting an uphill battle since the passage of the controversial India Act of 1919. While neither drastically enhancing the powers of local authorities, nor completely overturning the traditional administrative system, the widely debated Act represented a paradigm shift in Indian Administration and led directly to the ultimate fulfillment of provincial autonomy

⁷⁷⁸ Furse, *Aucuparius*, 241.

⁷⁷⁹ Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 60-65.

⁷⁸⁰ For this view, see Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers*, 64.

in 1935. If the India Act of 1919 represented the carrot of constitutional reforms extended by the British to Indian Nationalists, the Rowlatt Act—otherwise known as the Black Acts—of the same year stood as the proverbial stick. Infamously, the Black Acts gave the British the extraordinary authority to suppress any and all activities deemed de-stabilizing and, in effect, established martial law in India. In concert, the 1919 India Act and the Rowlatt Act ignited a firestorm of nationalist activity in India. Both mass dissatisfaction with the failure of the 1919 Act to grant full self-government *and* the apparent injustices of the Black Acts sparked a wave of protest within Britain’s most prized colonial possession. Under the guidance of the Indian National Congress and its most active member, Mohandas Gandhi, Indian Nationalists made a concerted effort during the inter-war years to force Britain to ‘Quit India’.

Perhaps predictably, many political officers within the ICS lamented the decision-making of its government. “Before the reforms,” wrote one Indian civil servant, “the unit upon which the administration pivoted was the district,” and “the administration of the district was controlled by the district officer.”⁷⁸¹ In short, as most Indian district officers viewed the situation, before 1919, the basis of the Raj’s administration was that the central government carried out its policy through the district administrative machine, which was headed by the district officer. Gradually, though, between 1919 and 1935, district officers in the Indian Civil Service began to feel the changes to the established order—changes that they grieved openly. As a part of this transitional period, British district officers increasingly found themselves being replaced by Indian administrators. Whereas at the turn of the twentieth-century only wealthy, well-connected Indians could even hope to join the ranks of the ICS, by 1929 more there were more than 367 Indians who held office in the administration. In particular, one member of the ICS summed up

⁷⁸¹ BLL. Mss.Eur D714/5: Memorandum on the effect of the reforms from the D.O.’s point of view.

the feelings of most Indian district officers when he wrote anonymously to the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* in March of 1919 his feeling that the Government in India would no longer help its own people.”⁷⁸²

More and more, political officers in India felt that they were being unjustly replaced and subordinated. Two officers of the Indian Civil Service, C. Dible and Robert Cleese wrote in an official report in 1928:

No doubt the control of the local administration was to pass to the Legislative Councils, but this did not mean that the existing system was to be destroyed. No doubt in the past district officers had been strong enough to influence the central Government, which had tended to rely mainly on them for advice. In fact, the DO had become practically the eyes and ears of the central government. No doubt it was contemplated by the authors of the reforms that he should no longer hold this position. Under the reforms the central Government was to look to the legislative councils for advice and guidance, rather than to him. The elected representatives of the people assembled in the Council were to be the eyes and ears of the central government. The DO was to become merely a servant to carry out the policy and orders of the central Government as directed by the Legislative Council. But this change was not to involve the entire destruction of his position, and radical alteration of the existing district machine. Instead of holding the position of master he was to take the position of servant. Instead of ordering how administration was to be carried out in his district, and tendering advice to the central Government, he was to be content to carry out the policy orders of the Central Government.⁷⁸³

Clearly, Dible and Cleese viewed these reforms as a direct challenge to the established order.

The reforms of 1919, they argued, contributed to the complete reversal of the administrative machine in India and upset the district officer’s traditional role in the Empire. Whereas the district officer had originally stood as the centerpiece of the administrative machine—the man who controlled the flow of information and orchestrated imperial policy—these reforms appeared to be attempting to turn the district officer into little more than a middleman between indigenous authorities and the central government. As Cleese and Dible explained it, the

⁷⁸² Anonymous, “Civil Service Pay” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* (March 15, 1919), 251.

⁷⁸³ BLL. Mss.Eur D714/5: Memorandum on the effect of the reforms from the D.O.’s point of view.

consequence of all this change was to “reduce [the district officer] to the position of an ordinary local departmental official.”⁷⁸⁴ In effect, Cleese Dible argued that the reforms of 1919 had irrevocably damaged the administrative machine and made their work almost impossible:

The damaged machine continues to work but clumsily and inefficiently. The DO no longer controls it. Formerly it was his duty to run his district and work the machine, and a good DO was the DO who ran his district well. Now he has to stand aside while the damaged machine is utilized to work the transferred subjects, and his duty is confined to the maintenance of law and order, collection of revenue, and the functioning of revenue courts.⁷⁸⁵

Dible and Cleese were far from being the only men to recognize the immensity of the changes that were to come after 1919. Even before the official passage of the 1919 India Act, some presumed its ultimate impact. Harry L. Stephen, veteran of the ICS, wrote in 1918 that the fundamental nature of imperial administration would be drastically, and devastatingly, altered as a result of the Government’s proposed actions. “Hitherto,” he offered, “the basis of the Government of India has been the District Officer, the Englishman... who is the head of a district and who is ultimately responsible for the execution of all Government orders.”⁷⁸⁶ With the proposal of the India Act of 1919, he concluded, “that is to cease.”⁷⁸⁷ Henceforth, the very nature of the government would be different, he wrote:

If a man wants anything that Government can provide, and that is a great deal, he is to apply for it to his representative on the local board or in the Provincial Government. He will probably not have a vote for either; but that does not matter in comparison with the experience he will gain in the working of responsible government. The DO will thus lose what is certainly the most attractive part of his work, which he has hitherto performed with efficiency that has secured for his service the reputation that it bears... The position of the English officer will admittedly be more difficult than it has been. ‘He will stand aside more from the work of carrying out orders and assume the position of a skilled

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ Harry L. Stephen, “Responsible Government in India” *The 19th Century and After* Vol. 84 (1918), 866-7.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

consultant.’ He will fit Indians to take their place beside him; he will have to convince rather than direct, and prevail in council rather than enforce an order.⁷⁸⁸

In this climate, many of the same concerns being voiced in the Colonial Service were likewise being vocalized in India. Slowly, throughout the 1920s, the changing nature of the work in the Indian Administration—and the subsequent decline in the authority and importance of the district officer—meant also the waning of the era of traditional moral emphasis. Just as was the case in the Colonial Office at the end of the same decade, a new type of administrator was preferred in India beginning in the 1920s. In 1921 an Indian Civil Servant wrote regretfully to the *London Times*, that the old Indian Civil Service was “dead:”

One of the joys of the Indian civilian of the days that are past was the camping in the winter season. No longer can he look forward to this, for the new rulers of India—the politically minded who fill the benches of the Council Chambers—have the greatest objection to camp life both for themselves and for others, and are determined to abolish...official touring which involves camping. Gone are the happy days when a DO could combine business with pleasure. He must exchange his seat on a horse for a seat at an office table, and instead of discovering the secrets of administration by direct contact with the people concerned, he must depend for his solution of the problems with which he has to deal on masses of contradictory information contained in stacks of papers which are put up by his subordinates.⁷⁸⁹

Writing under the alias, Komma, the author continued

The rules of the service prevent me from signing my name, and it is right, therefore, that you should know with what authority I make these statements. I am an Indian civilian who has served my time for pension. I have had a happy life in India, and I have had more than the average luck...I see clearly that if those reforms are successful the young English administrator who comes to India now will have a very poor time. Unless he is imbued with a truly missionary spirit, unless the faith that is in him is strong enough to enable him to see the distant prospect of the political regeneration of the people, and ultimate complete independence of the country which is falsely called the brightest jewel in England’s crown, India is not for him. Such is the advice I have given my own son.⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ *London Times* “The I.C.S.” 6 Sept. 1921: 9

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

The real danger in India, according to the author of the above article, rested on the fact that the changing nature of the service meant that it would be increasingly difficult for the district officer to do his job as he once had. New methods of administration would inevitably mean new types of administrators. Just two days after Komma's article appeared in the *Times*, another former Indian district officer chimed in anonymously to support his colleague's sentiments. Echoing Komma's remarks, the second article argued,

I always add that the greatest danger ahead of us lies in any possible deterioration in the standard of the service which at present rules India, and also the action of those home politicians who, not knowing or understanding the natives, do not realize the importance of keeping up that standard. I hold that we keep India not by the sword, but by the Englishman's gift of telling the truth and keeping his word—in other words, by utilizing the services of English gentlemen; and it will be a bad day for India, and for England, when we cease to be able to command the services of that class.⁷⁹¹

One of the major consequences of the reforms of 1919 and after, according to a number of district officers, was that the British were losing touch with the people of India. The effect was that, rather than working together to keep stability and minimize grievances, relations broke down. The cures of the motor car manifested itself just as plainly in the minds of Indian civil servants as they had in Africa. J.C. Moore of the Indian Civil Service lamented, "...without a doubt the man who did not camp never got to know the people as we did. The Indian cannot be hurried and a rushed visit by motor car is no substitute for a camp on the spot. Personally I think that the man who did not camp, such as in my time the District Judges or members of the Secretariat missed the greatest joy of his service."⁷⁹² Another member of the ICS added in 1925

⁷⁹¹ *London Times*. "The I.C.S." 8 Sept. 1921: 4

⁷⁹² BLL. Mss. Eur. D775: J.C. Moore Memoirs, "*Chota Sahib: Memoirs of the British Raj in India, 1909-1916*, 10.

that the influence and ability of the Indian district officer was irreparably damaged when “the sahib lives in a hotel.”⁷⁹³

All across the Dependent Empire, it became readily apparent to the old-guard of political officers that a new order was emerging in the Empire. Administrators under the employ of the Colonial Office detected the changing emphasis on the nature of district officers entering the Empire while members of the ICS watched as their traditional authority was meted out to local leaders. District officers from all across the Empire noted these changes and mourned them. In studying their reactions to these reforms, one can attain an important and often overlooked window into the district officer’s thoughts on imperial administration, its strengths, and its weaknesses.

Just as many district officers feared that too heavy a reliance on the whims and the policies of the out-of-touch governors and secretariats would lead to the severance of the link between the colonizer and the colonized, they also feared that the same result might occur if the ‘old guard’ of character-driven administrators were replaced by new generations of ‘technocrats’ and intellectuals. One of the most egregious problems brought to light during the third decade of the twentieth-century is an affliction that might be best described as the ‘curse of the motor car’.⁷⁹⁴ Generations of district officers who served across the Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries considered the “old foot safari” the best way to administer a district and to maintain close working relations with local peoples.⁷⁹⁵ For Frank Longland, “in the early

⁷⁹³ *Manchester Guardian*, “Housekeeping in India” November 21, 1925, 10.

⁷⁹⁴ RHO. Heussler Papers: Mss. Brit. Emp. s. 480. Box 4, File 1, Folio 58: “Responses to questions posed to Frank Longland,” 27 April 1965.

⁷⁹⁵ For instance, see RHO. Grier Papers, “Letter to his mother” January 3, 1917; E.K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate*, 12; BLL. Mss. Eur. D775: J.C. Moore Memoirs, “*Chota Sahib: Memoirs of the British Raj in India, 1909-1916*,” 10; RHO. Heussler Papers, “Notes from John Carrow.” 1960;

days if one had to go from A to B one had to go on the flat of one's feet."⁷⁹⁶ Longland was no Luddite. He possessed no inherent rejection of modern technology or the comforts of modernity. His thinking was deeper. A district officer who remained strapped to his motor car was still limited in the areas and the peoples he could reach. In the minds of most district officers, trekking by foot across hundreds—sometimes thousands—of square miles of territory served as the best way to know the conditions of the district and its peoples. Walking from place to place, going on 'tour' for weeks or even months at a time, making camp in isolated villages, having conversations with multiple groups of people—these were the ways in which a district officer could truly earn the loyalty and respect of his charge. Yet, with the proliferation of roads and the gradual appearance of motorized vehicles in the colonies, political officers, like Longland, worried about the effect of this new technology on the health of the Empire. Longland wrote,

'Safari' remained but the method of 'safari' was beginning to alter. The old foot safari, when one met people on the road and talked with them, was fading into a thing of the past. No time for foot safari owing to the pressure of work at the *boma*? Perhaps—but I have known men who wanted to get back for tennis in the evening, or a wife and family demanded his attention. Do not mistake me. I may not be saying this was universally true but I do think the accursed motor transport helped us to lose touch. The habit of settling matters with ones foot on the running board did not help very much.⁷⁹⁷

Heavy reliance on the motor car meant that new generations of district officers were tempted to neglect more isolated sections of their districts, limiting communication, trust, and the fulfillment of the British 'civilizing mission'.⁷⁹⁸

To many, the implications of these failures were clear. To another district officer, who wrote anonymously to the *Manchester Guardian*, "closer contact with a primitive land comes

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ Lumley, 12.

from a day's trek on foot than from a month on wheels."⁷⁹⁹ Motor roads and motor vehicles of the new age of administrator increasingly led to a loss of personal touch. For Richard Oakley:

A pioneer [political officer] once said to me: 'never pass a village which comes within your radius when on trek, however difficult it may be to reach. If you do so, it is sure to be misinterpreted by the inhabitants, and may lead to trouble later...' For my part, I took this advice literally, and possibly to my own undoing; but I am sure that it is good. Too readily now does the district officer dash out in his car to some center of a district and interview the chief and his assembled village heads; then off he goes on another mission, missing villages by the way and off the beaten track, thus losing personal contacts with the villagers, who, you may be sure, have heard of his passing.⁸⁰⁰

The curse of this new technology, according to Nigerian District Officers, F.C. Royce and ACG Hastings, was the symptom of a much larger problem. The trouble, Royce claimed, originated with the changing culture of the Colonial Service and the type of man now desired by the Colonial Office. New appointees to the political services, Royce complained, "are introduced straight from a University to a table where [they] study office routine to the exclusion of all else."⁸⁰¹ As opposed to the all-around man, new recruits into the colonial services, Hastings lamented, were technocrats. They were specially trained experts, not the philistine of old. Hastings echoed Royce's conclusions, writing

The young officer of today is required to pass a not too crucial test of knowledge in a string of subjects from law to logwood, and does so more or less efficiently. He learns to use a prismatic compass, and plot his wavering results neatly on paper. He tries and fails, like most of us, to understand the Moslem law of inheritance, wrestling with the accursed fractions of estate division, and reviling the uterine brother or consanguine sister in his struggles. He can tell you why the mosquito sings before it stings, what the boll worm does to cotton, how to treat a snake bite, with a hundred other things, and emerges from the contest a worthy if somewhat puzzled candidate for the work.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁹ "Cape to Cairo" *The Manchester Guardian*, February 15, 1932, page 5.

⁸⁰⁰ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palvers* (London: Seely, Service, & Co., 1938.), 288.

⁸⁰¹ TNA. Kew. CO 583/244/21 (30451) Situation in Nigerian: views of Captain F C Royce, former district officer in Southern Nigeria, 1939.

⁸⁰² ACG Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 17.

For Royce, this approach stood in stark contrast to the traditional training a district officer received wherein an inexperienced district officer was “sent or taken among the people to learn their ways first hand. All he gets nowadays,” Royce wrote, “is a mental picture of them which he must gather from political files—if he is allowed to read them.”⁸⁰³ In the aftermath of the creation of the Colonial Service training course, R. Slater added in October of 1927, “all I can say is that every single cadet in my thirteen years of experience has emphatically dubbed it as useless and over their heads.”⁸⁰⁴ Instead, Slater emphasized that “the right kind of cadet” would have absolutely no problem, “teaching himself by thinking over the weird books and documents he has to keep and asking his...district officer questions.” In particular, Royce and Slater worried about the effects of this new atmosphere on the quality of district officers around the Empire. To the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm Macdonald, Royce wrote in 1939

A typical example of a Divisional Officer programme [*sic*] in an apparently quiet division is: Rise at 8 am; office 9-1; rest in the afternoon; gardening or recreation till dark; or perhaps a trip in his car at 4d per mile along a main road. He travels maybe a total of 8 days a month to Rent Houses set rigidly away from the people he is supposed to be visiting and to which the inhabitants have to carry his fuel and water.⁸⁰⁵

As an indication of the degree to which the mood in the Colonial Office had changed, Royce’s complaints, which he sent directly to the Colonial Secretary, were virtually dismissed outright. One of Macdonald’s under-secretaries, O.G.R. William, commented on Royce’s letter before sending it on to Macdonald, writing

I do not think you need to read his long letter, which is a curious mixture of shrewd and possible, to some extent, justified comment with other criticism which, to say the best of it, is biased, and some of it is so wrong-headed as to be absurd...I do not think it would be profitable to comment at length upon the various points raised in this letter, and I suggest

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ TNA. Kew. CO 96/675/5. Extract from a letter sent from R. Slater on the Training of Newly appointed ADCs in the Gold Coast, October 28, 1927.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

that it would be enough to reply thanking him for the trouble that he has taken in putting his views before the [Secretary of State].⁸⁰⁶

Despite being disregarded by Macdonald and his staff, Royce was in no way in the minority in his beliefs.

Echoing Royce's conclusions, E.A. Temple-Perkins submitted similar suggestions to the governor of his colony toward the end of his career. He suggested

that it might be a most beneficial innovation in the C.S. if some officials—especially administrative officers—were to undergo, fairly early in their careers, a course of what might be termed 'living incognito'. They should be exiled from the spacious offices and sent out to live close to the African as I do—dismantled of the trappings of officialdom, shorn of all prestige and privilege of office, and become ordinary mortals living on their own merits--no longer the 'big white chiefs'.⁸⁰⁷

Another district officer with vast experience in Nigeria, Richard Oakley, worried

It may be said that with the great strides which have taken place in the country during recent years there is not time for the older, slower methods; that the DO has more important matters with which to deal at H.Q.; and that the A.D.O.s supply the personal touch. It may be so at present, but will it be so for long? I fear the 'speeding up' will cut out the older, slower methods all together in time, which have really made our administration what it is—a fair and just one—and what it should be for many generations to come—a *personal* one. The only way to preserve this, to my mind, is by the old fashion trekking by pony or on foot, so that not only the A.D.O., but the "Big Man", the district officer, with whom the villagers really wish to see, still comes into contact with the people themselves. I believe that time spent thus is time best spent.⁸⁰⁸

Due to the changes he witnessed after the passage of the Warren Fisher committee, Oakley fretted "the day has perhaps gone by when a man could become a 'little king' in his district."⁸⁰⁹

Instead of the old way of allowing the district officer a great deal of freedom to deal with local affairs as he saw fit, Oakley noticed a marked transformation in which, he claimed, "there

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ RHO. Temple-Perkins, *Unadorned Career*, 108.

⁸⁰⁸ Richard Oakley, *Treks and Palavers*, 288.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

appears to be a tendency to control everything from the center, and too little is left to the man on the spot.”⁸¹⁰

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

V. Conclusion: The head boys of Empire

To speak of an ‘official mind’ of the British Empire is to reference a very specific cultural worldview, unique to an elite group of administrators who served Britain and its Empire during the last quarter of the 19th century and roughly the first twenty-five years of the 20th. During this period, regardless of the particular service or colony in question, the vast majority of district officers within the Dependent Empire carried out their duties with a clearly definable ethos and vision. Although individuals in their own right, the uniformity of their backgrounds led most of these civil servicemen to similar conclusions about their role in the districts, the purpose of British administration at large, and underlying *raison d'être* of their Empire. The experiences that nearly all of these men shared in their youth established a precedent by which Britain’s future imperial administrators were likely to have been instructed by the same educators, taught the same lessons, made many of the same acquaintances, and shared a markedly similar understanding of their country’s history. All of these experiences had an unmistakable impact on how political officers behaved later in life. Very rarely in the course of human history have groups of individuals perceived the world in such uniform terms, as did British district officers at the height of the Empire. To claim that there was no unity of mind or unity of purpose congealing Britain’s imperial experience is to miss out completely on the centrality of this culture.

Up to this point, though, the accepted historiographical understanding of British imperialism centered on the idea that no one discernable or definable “directing theory” stood behind the British Empire. In short, the implication has been the perceived impossibility of an official mind of British imperialism. Such a thing simply could not exist because, in the words of historian Ronald Hyam, “there was no time in the twentieth-century that the Colonial Office

staff was a of a single mind.”⁸¹¹ To disprove this misnomer, this dissertation has approached the question of an official mind of British imperialism by looking through the typically ignored and dismissed lens of the colonial civil services. As the most important agents of British imperialism, district officers literally ran the day-to-day affairs of the colonial administration, decided the fate of policies, and controlled the official conversation in the colonies. The consequence of this reevaluation is that it turns the traditional imperial narrative of fragmentation, and so-called irregularity of empire, upside down. This new approach offers both a refreshing look at the nature of the British Empire, and opens up opportunities for new research in the field of British imperial studies.

In particular, the first revealing conclusion that can be drawn about Britain’s official mind through an exposition of the colonial services centers on a more useful and nuanced understanding of the term ‘difference’ as it related to British perceptions of both Europeans and non-Europeans. There is absolutely no question that the British district officer was sensitive to notions of both similarity and difference in the Empire. At one and the same time, district officers approached imperial questions of administration in terms that were familiar to them, while also having a heightened sensitivity to what they perceived to be different. They defined difference and similarity based on their conceptions of morality, generated during their youth. In many ways, as has been seen, district officers often defined themselves based on what they perceived that they were and what they were not. As confident, paternalistic products of the public school system, they identified themselves as the ‘men who could get things done’. Yet, they were quick to distinguish themselves from the intellectual types, the careerists, the ‘great men’, and the ‘sell outs’.

⁸¹¹ Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, 211.

Through a study of the district officer's experiences, definitions of what terms like 'different' actually meant to the British come into sharper focus. Britain's colonial civil servants, for instance, were just as likely to associate the concept of 'difference' with their fellow European imperialists, as they were with their colonial subjects. The common denominator in both cases was the absence of British traditions of gentility, morality, and national history. The French seemed different to men like ACG Hastings because they had been trained differently and, by consequence, behaved differently in the empire. As the British district officer conceived it, the French had opposing moral proclivities. Interestingly, British district officers drew the exact same conclusions about individuals within their own ranks. Political officers understood colonial Governors and other high-ranking officials to be different because, although these figures may have received the proper gentlemanly training (although sometimes they did not), the 'great men' seemed to fail to put that training into action.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this understanding of district officers' conception of difference also explains their approaches to the colonized. Just as members of the colonial services honed in on moral differences among themselves and their European counterparts, so too did they acknowledge and respond to the dissimilarities they found in their districts, and the people who lived there. Generally viewing their colonial subjects as civilizationally 'behind' Britain's own national progress, many district officer's equated African, Indian, and other non-Europeans to be a younger, immature version of themselves. As a result of the moral deficiencies district officers believed they found in the Empire, they responded by invoking a deeply engrained sense of paternalism they had developed during their youth. As the proverbial prefects of empire, colonial civil servants aimed to slowly evolve the nature of indigenous societies along the same lines of moral development that their own nation had endured.

In this sense, the official mind of the colonial services remained in tact through the first quarter of the twentieth-century. Gradually, though, shifting priorities at home fundamentally altered the ethos that had been firmly implanted during the Victorian Era. While the emphasis on morality, service-mindedness, gentility, and philistinism did not disappear overnight, an obvious transformation was underway by 1930. Furse's blatant implementation of officially sanctioned patronage came under fire from a Labour Party determined to re-write the rules. Gradually, over the next decade a new type of administrator took root in the Empire—the technical expert. As numerous district officers opined during these years, with a new guard of administrator, came a new approach to Empire. In this new environment, the district officer no longer held the same authority he once had. Through the curse of the motor car, he lost touch with the people and became subject to previously unimaginable oversight from the central authorities. Combined with the devastation of the Second World War, the Empire could not bear the strains. The rest, as they say, is history.

Significantly, though, an inquiry of the life and activities of the district officer supplies numerous opportunities for further research and stands to contribute enormously to the field of imperial studies. For all their high-mindedness, district officers understood that the nature of British imperialism in Africa, India, and beyond was a game of give and take. Whatever their faults and follies, they represented the face of the British Empire in the colonies and stood at the point of contact between the rulers of empire and its imperial subjects. Though at one time there may have been a tendency on the part of scholars to write of colonial subjects as actors without agency, this is not how the district officer approached those under their charge. ACG Hastings wrote of British imperial administration in Africa, "Twas a great game and they [Africans] were

expert players at it.”⁸¹² A study of this inter-relationship between the literal man on the spot and indigenous populations stands to add enormously to our historical understandings of the true nature of both British imperialists *and* colonial subjects.

⁸¹² ACG Hastings, *Nigerian Days*, 42.

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