

The Importance of the Years 1880-1890 in the
History of the British Empire.

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The year 1878 may be said to have been the beginning of a new era in European political outlook and relations. Since the Franco-German War the Eastern Question had been the only political situation in Europe which really interested Great Britain, but, after the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, even that interest began to diminish. On a general survey it would seem that the attention of European statesmen till 1878 was directed mainly upon affairs in Europe, but that after since then it has been centred upon those ⁱⁿ of Africa and Asia. For a few decades after that year no European problem pressed for immediate solution, Italy had attained her nationality, Prussia no longer struggled with Austria and France, and even the Eastern Question had ceased to be explosive. Moreover, a great change occurred in the attitude of European states towards colonial possessions. Disraeli expressed the popular view in England before 1878 when he said "these wretched colonies will all be independent in a few years and are like a millstone round our necks." Bismarck also disliked colonies, but the view of one and the policy of the other changed.

Europe, no longer self-sufficient, began to realize the necessity for expansion, economic needs, especially for raw materials, were vitally important, and the populations of the various countries required outlets. The amazing material developments of the nineteenth century - in science, industry, means of communication, and

modern finance) - made it almost inevitable that European civilisation should control those parts of the world which were either uninhabited or occupied by barbaric peoples. It likewise became inevitable that the world should become a single economic unit.

There were other causes of this changed world-policy of the European states. In the words of ^{Mr.} Ramsay Muir "a new political ideal had captivated the mind of Europe". In all its various forms it may be called the Doctrine of Power. Each state sought to reach the standard of the world-state, to acquire control of extensive dominions. Perhaps no state has ever been so completely ~~by~~ this theory as Germany; and no statesman has ever practised this doctrine more strongly than Treitschke, whose influence was at its height during the great rush for extra-European dominions. The period 1880 to 1890 was one of 'imperialism' in the bad sense of the term. But it was attended by other motives which arose from other European developments. By 1878 the European states had definitely discarded the principles of free trade for the protectionist policy, which has for its ideal national self-sufficiency. The latter seemed possible only by extensive annexations principally in Africa and Asia. Moreover, for a complete conception of the motives which actuated the leading European states, it must be realised in addition that Europe had entered upon the era of large national armies, in the main a result of the Prussian militaristic policy. For a most important factor in European politics at the time was the prestige and power of Germany, a member of the formidable Triple Alliance of 1879.

Britain, ^{already possessor of a vast colonial empire,} was drawn into the struggle less by inclination than by a necessity for ^a protection of ^a interests. Within the British Empire the period is notable for a greater unity between England and her dominions.

Federation and closer co-operation appeared to be successful not only economically, but for military purposes, for the burden of armaments was becoming increasingly heavy. In Britain, partly through the influence of Disraeli's changed views regarding colonies, and partly through economic needs, a revulsion of feeling took place. This new policy gradually expelled the laissez-faire attitude of the Manchester School. It is notable moreover that the colonies themselves were quickly developing into self-governing members of the Empire, capable of controlling their own internal affairs.

In 1880 Lord Beaconsfield, having been in office for six and a half years, appealed to the country in a general election. He suffered a decisive defeat, however, and retired from office, for although Gladstone's imperial policy had been too supine, that of Beaconsfield had been too adventurous. Gladstone then formed his second administration, which was joined by Lords Granville, Hartington, and Chamberlain. During the next five years a succession of crises arose, which Gladstone's ministry had to attempt to solve.

In Britain Ireland occupied much of the public attention. The obstructive tactics of Parnell, the Irish Nationalist leader, necessitated new rules of procedure in the House of Commons, while the agrarian outrages demanded new coercive measures. Gladstone passed a second Irish Land Bill of great complexity in 1881, and ~~as yet~~ with the Queen's assistance the Reform Bill was passed three years later. Gladstone himself became ^{finally} convinced that the only solution of the Irish question was Home Rule, but the appearance of the Bill ^{in 1886} to that effect was disastrous to his party.

In the vast Indian Empire suspicion of Russian designs was the most prominent characteristic in foreign policy. In the north-west Afghanistan was regarded as

a buffer state between the Indian and the Russian Empires, and thus the good-will of the Amir was regarded as essential for the security of India. In 1848 Russian intrigues at Kabul caused the Second Afghan War. The Amir was deposed and Yakub Khan, who succeeded him, agreed to a British officer residing at Kabul. A few months later Sir Louis Cavagnar, the British resident, was murdered, and war began with the occupation of Kabul. In September, 1880, a British brigade was defeated by the Herati army of Ayub Khan, but the defeat was quickly retrieved by the brilliant march of General Sir Frederick Roberts from Kabul to Kandahar. This war led to the annexation of Quetta and other districts in south-eastern Afghanistan. Eventually Abdur Rahman Khan was made Amir and given subsidies, and the British retired. While these events were taking place, the general election of 1880 was held in England and Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India, resigned with the Conservative ministry.

The Marquis of Ripon, his successor, was sent out to infuse a liberal spirit into Indian administrations. He attempted to breathe life into the executives. His term of office was peaceful, and hence there was abundant leisure for internal reform. A classification of schools was made, and a Department of Agriculture created. His chiefly notable for the agitation against the Ilbert Bill, which proposed to subject European offenders to native magistrates.

For some time after the Afghan War relations between Russia and British India remained uneasy and suspicious. In 1884 the Panjdeh incident brought the two nations to the verge of war. It was not till the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 that relations became more amicable. It was at this time that new military measures were inaugurated. The Indian

Army was increased to ten thousand British and twenty thousand native troops, Imperial Service troops were established, and the frontier post of Quetta was connected with the Indian railway system.

In December, 1884, Lord Dufferin succeeded ^{the Marquis of} Lord Ripon. In the following year the Third Burmese War with King Thebaw led to the annexation of Upper Burma. Gradually, moreover, because of the concentration, from 1885 onwards, of the Indian government on the north-west frontiers, British suzerainty was proclaimed over many of the tribes of the north-west. From 1885 to 1895 the various frontiers were delimited by joint commissions, while the most important frontier of Afghanistan and India was defined by the Durand Agreement of 1893.

The period of Lord Dufferin was one of practical beneficence. The principle of agrarian reform was consistently applied by him to the native provinces. These years also mark the commencement of the "Congress Movement", which advocated the elective principle in legislature, and a judicial branch of the Public Service separate from the Executive. As a result, owing to the initiative of the Viceroy, the Indian Councils Act of 1892 was passed. In December, 1888, his place was taken by Lord Lansdowne. His term of office was one of equilibrium and calm. Indian affairs were prudently administered, and much of his time was devoted to the domestic welfare of the Indian people.

A general survey of Indian affairs during this single decade shows sweeping social, political, and economic changes. The rupee was finally stabilised in 1893 as a result of prosperity, there was a large increase in sea-borne trade, and that vast co-empire reaped the benefits of the Pax Britannica.

The ill-fortune which attended British policy in South Africa culminated in the years 1877 to 1881. In

the former year the Transvaal was annexed. It was weak financially, its leaders were divided and hence ineffective, and it was becoming a menace to the whole European population in South Africa because of its failure to combat the invasions and unrest of the natives on its boundaries. The annexation had two direct results. it angered the Zulus, and the Zulu War of 1879 was fought, secondly, it caused the rising of the Transvaal Boers or the First Boer War. In regard to the expressed intention of the British Government of granting self-government, both the ministry of Disraeli and that of Gladstone pursued a policy which has been termed "loitering unwisdom". Moreover British rule had become hateful to the Boers because it meant taxation. Suddenly in 1881, under the leadership of Pretorius, Kruger, and Joubert, they rose. The British forces under Sir George Colley were repulsed at Laing's Nek, but the crowning disaster came with the defeat at Majuba Hill. Gladstone's Government finally agreed to recognise the Transvaal as an Independent Sovereign State, but three years later it was given the title of the South African Republic. But Paul Kruger, president of the new republic, had visions of a Boer Empire. Cecil Rhodes, however, had yet wider visions of a ^{united} South Africa as a dominion of the British Empire, and largely through his efforts, Kruger's attempts to extend the power of the Transvaal Republic were foiled. In the west Bechuanaland, which was quickly becoming ~~the~~ prey of Boers and filibusters, was declared a British protectorate in 1885. In the east Zululand was annexed in 1887, and in the north the British South Africa Company obtained control of the country now known as Rhodesia. Meanwhile the internal conditions of the Transvaal were entirely altered by the discovery of gold in 1886. Immigrants flocked into the Republic, and the town of Johannesburg was created.

But the bitterness was revived between the Boers and the other Europeans or Uitlanders, and it finally culminated in the South African War.

During the years with which we are dealing events in Egypt and the Soudan were of outstanding importance. The reign of Ismail Pasha in the former country was, it has been said, "a carnival of extravagance and oppression". In 1876 he repudiated the State debts. By this action the intervention of the chief creditors, Britain and France, was made inevitable. A dual control was established in 1878 over Egyptian finances, and Tewfik, Ismail's son, was nominated Khedive. Soon an anti-foreign movement arose, of which the motto was "Egypt for the Egyptians", and in 1881, when Arabi Pasha, by a successful military revolt, threatened to bring Egypt to anarchy, at a conference of the Great Powers France and Britain decided they should intervene to restore order. At the last moment France, fearful of Bismarck's European designs, declined to take action, and Britain was obliged to proceed alone. In July, 1882, Alexandria was bombarded and the batteries destroyed. The revolt was finally suppressed by Sir Garnet Wolseley's victory over Arabi's forces at Tel-el-Kebir in the September of the same year. Thereupon the Khedive's power was re-established, and some British forces were left in the country.

Meanwhile danger arose in the distant provinces of Egypt known as the Soudan. A formidable rebellion of fanatics broke out under the leadership of "the Mahdi". An army under Hicks Pasha was sent by the Khedive to crush the Dervishes, but in 1883 it was totally destroyed. It was decided by the British Government to evacuate the country. To superintend it General Gordon was sent to the Soudan, but a dangerous delay occurred, the relief expedition under Wolseley was sent too late, and Gordon ^{Gordon} was besieged in Khartoum, and after a heroic defence

killed in January 1885 by the Mahdi's followers. It is a notable fact that during these military operations in Egypt New South Wales and India sent the first contingents of from the colonies to aid English troops.

The fall of Khartoum meant a complete evacuation of the Sudan, but to Egypt itself the triumph of Mahdism was a terrible menace. Britain decided to hold a provisional occupation until Egypt might be sufficiently organised to control ^{its} ~~her~~ own affairs. Her task was of apparently insuperable difficulties. But British administrators, engineers, financiers, and jurists, under the masterly guidance of Lord Cromer, "the creator of modern Egypt", brought the country from bankruptcy ^{financial} to prosperity and from anarchy and rebellion to the rule of law and order. The rule of Lord Cromer, whose policy was marked by sagacious and patient statesmanship, has well been called a rule of "benevolent despotism".

At this time the discoveries of explorers, more especially ^{those of} Stanley and Livingstone, had aroused European interest in Africa. In 1884 began what was called the "Grab for Africa". The Franco-German War had an important bearing on this scramble for territory. As a result France turned to Africa to remedy her losses and at first Germany favoured French annexations, Italy achieved unity and desired colonies, lastly, in Germany unity at home was followed by expansion abroad. Bismarck, who had little interest in colonies except as a means of alienating the other powers in order to secure European supremacy, was forced by the younger generation in Germany to annex large areas. Thus in 1880 Italy annexed Assab Bay and France declared a Protectorate over Tunis. The International African Association of 1876 was followed by the Berlin Conference of 1885. The latter in reality

laid down the "rules of the game". The resolution adopted declared that there should be free trade and navigation in the Congo and adjacent regions, that only effective occupation was valid, and that the Congo Free State would be recognised as such. France had already inaugurated her vast West African Empire on the Senegal and as her policy of cutting off the British settlements from access to the interior, and of themselves gaining access to the sea at the Ivory Coast, French Congo, and French Guinea. Chiefly through the enterprise of Sir George Goldie a British chartered company acquired rights over Nigeria. On the east coast through the instrumentality of the notorious agent, Carl Peters, some sixty thousand square miles were placed under German control, but Zanzibar and the territory now British East Africa were created British possessions. In 1878 at Sir Barthélemy's instigation, who foresaw the German menace, Walfisch Bay was annexed, but the Home government refused to sanction the acquisition of any more territory in that region. Thus in 1883 Lüderitz acquired ^a large area ^{for Germany} around Walfisch Bay — German South-West Africa. In the next year Dr. Nachtigal, ostensibly commissioned to report on German trade interests on the west coast, placed the Cameroons and Togoland under the German control. A few years later Britain declared a protectorate over Socotra and British Somaliland in the north.

From Africa the scramble for possessions spread to the Far East. Britain obtained the protectorate of Sarawak and Borneo in 1888. The last regions competed for were the islands of the Pacific Ocean. Of these the partition was completed ~~in~~ during the nineties, with Britain, Germany, and the United States of America as chief participants.

Throughout this period the political tendency in Australia was towards federation. Numerous

conferences, the last in 1890, finally resulted in the Federal Bill of 1891. The Federal Council of 1883 was concerned with the projected annexation of New Guinea. Again, it advocated the undesirability of allowing further French settlements in the Pacific or their r  cidiviste policy being carried out. Popular feeling finally prevailed over the placid and slow-moving Colonial Office, and as the a portion ^{of New Guinea} was annexed. But the failure and neglect of the British government to prevent the acquisition of the other portions ^{by Germany} was an additional cause of the federation movement. A few years later ^{an} agreement was made with France for the partition of the New Hebrides, and another between Germany and Britain defined the limits of mutual acquisition in the Pacific. (Please insert here paragraphs omitted which is placed at end of essay)

In New Zealand this decade with which we are concerned was a period of almost total inactivity in the legislative sphere. It was mainly a period of land legislation culminating in the Land Bill of 1891. It was the opposition led by Sir George Grey which advocated progressive social legislation. These years were the last stage of a long conservative administration, or the "Continuous Ministry" as it was called. The government was obliged to pursue an unpopular policy of taxation and economy. Manhood suffrage was conceded in 1888, and two years later a new force entered politics - organised labour. In these years two of the leading political personages were Sir Harry Atkinson and Sir Julius Vogel. The former was defeated in 1890 by the Progressive party under Sir John Ballance whose advent caused a striking change in public life, although he continued the prudent financial policy of his predecessor. ~~The~~ Sir Julius Vogel was mainly concerned with restoring financial stability, but his work was ^{also most} valuable in ^{the} postal and telegraph departments, in railway development, and in colonial defence.

Especially towards the end of our period was the growing influence of Seddon felt, who was opposing the government with "stone-walling" tactics. In years to come his humanitarian spirit was to have great influence on the trend of events in New Zealand.

As in New Zealand it was a time of conservative rule in Canada. The premiership of the distinguished politician Sir John Macdonald continued from 1878 till his death in 1891, while his party remained in power till 1896. Their supremacy was due to their policy of rapid and progressive development, especially favourable to a young country like Canada. The government throughout its administration strongly advocated a protective tariff policy. In spite of a vigorous agitation by the Liberals for closer trade relations with the United States of America under the names of Commercial Union and Unrestricted Reciprocity, the Conservatives remained firm; for they asserted that commercial union would inevitably lead to ~~to~~ political unification. Thus protection became the recognised policy of Canada, and resulted in more independence of the American markets, and greater financial prosperity.

Meanwhile the government had begun its vigorous railway policy. A contract was made with a new company to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway in ten years. The gigantic task, however, was finished in November, 1886, five years before the stipulated time. This railway was a potent factor in the internal development of Canada which followed: steamship services began on the Great Lakes and the Pacific, and immigrants began to move westward to the immense fertile areas of Central Canada. While the railway was under construction Riel led a second rebellion of half-breeds and Indians. The rebels disliked the advance of Western civilisation and feared the extermination of

the buffalo. The revolt was quelled by Riel's defeat at Batoche. In spite of the sympathy felt for the rebels, the united effort during this short military campaign had a unifying effect on the various parts of Canada. In conclusion we may say that it was during these years that the great lines of policy, which have governed the growth and development of Canada, were laid down.

We may conclude that these ten years were of witnessed events of ^{the} most vital importance in the development and ^{ation} form of the British Empire. Professor Egerton has said that "the British Empire of today is without a precedent in the past". His observation is of great significance. Its vast extent is not the only thing to be considered, the acquisition of the immensely regions we call the British Empire has brought with it vast ^{immense} responsibilities. The problems of self-government, the problems of trade and defence, the problems of the coloured races, are not easy of solution. But it is of the very greatest importance, in the relations between Britain and the dominions, that the instinct of self-government should be fostered, that the growth of a national spirit should be recognised, and that the bonds of friendship and union should remain inviolate. ^{In conclusion} Finally, let us quote Mr Ramsay Muir, "The essence of the British system is the free development of natural tendencies, and the encouragement of variety of types, and the future towards which the Empire seems to be tending is not that of a highly centralised and unified state, but that of a brotherhood of free nations, united by community of ideas and institutions, co-operating for many common ends, and above all for the common defence in case of need, but each freely following the natural trend of its own development."

(Please insert this paragraph where indicated above). [In 1888, as the result of an assembly of colonial delegates in England in connection with the Colonial Exhibition and Royal Jubilee celebrations,

the Imperial Defence Act was passed. The assembly, a forerunner of many such conferences, which discussed the defence of the Empire and commercial policy, greatly strengthened the bonds of union between Britain and her colonies.]
