

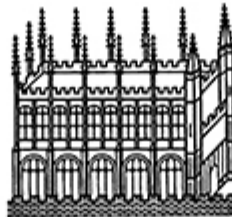


SCANNED BY

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES  
IMAGING SERVICE**

FROM THE COLLECTIONS IN

**THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**



Centimeter



Inches

THE ROUND TABLE, 1910 - 66

Alexander C. May

St John's College, Oxford

Thesis submitted for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy.

Oxford, January 1995



TITLE: The Round Table, 1910-66  
AUTHOR: Alexander May  
SOCIETY: St John's College, Oxford  
DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy  
SUBMISSION DATE: January 1995

This thesis traces the history of the London Round Table group and of the *Round Table* magazine from their origins in 1909-10 until the decision to launch a "new" *Round Table* in 1966. It takes as its focus the ideas put forward by members of the group, in the *Round Table* and elsewhere, on a range of Imperial and international problems. It utilises knowledge of the authorship of *Round Table* articles in order to clarify the processes by which Round Table policy was made, and the rôle of different individuals within the group. It examines the rôle of the Round Table as a pressure group for Imperial reform and in particular its relationship to Empire federalism, seeking to elucidate the extent to which it was able to act coherently, and attempting to describe its aims, methods and influence. On the question of federalism, the thesis finds an inability to agree on details, but also a continuing belief in the necessity for constitutional unity until the late 1940s. It suggests that this belief was not entirely unrealistic. The thesis argues that, despite differences of emphasis, the Round Table was able to develop a distinctive ideology of Imperialism which was strongly supportive of the Imperial rôle yet also responsive to the need for change. It finds that the group was only briefly influential on government policy, under Lloyd George's administration, but it argues that the group saw its main purpose as that of influencing long-term opinion rather than short-term policy. It suggests that the group was able to play an important mediating rôle, between conservatism and radicalism, and between policy-making and opinion.

ABSTRACT: THE ROUND TABLE, 1910-66

Historians of British Imperialism have long been fascinated by the Round Table group. There are a number of reasons for this: the group's rôle as a movement for Empire federalism at a crucial stage in Anglo-Dominion relations, its development of a progressive ideology of Imperialism, its embodiment of metropolitan liberalism and its part in the demission of British power, its attempts to influence British foreign policy, and its reputation as a secretive "camarilla" exercising power by means of "backstairs influence". The history of the Round Table thus has a bearing on a number of important questions, including the nature of the metropolitan-colonial relationship and of the process of decolonisation, the relationship between British Imperial and foreign policy, and the rôle of pressure groups in the making of policy.

The origins and early history of the Round Table have been the subject of a number of studies, including two books, by Walter Nimocks and John Kendle. Both concentrate on the "imperial federation" aspect of the Round Table project, and argue that the Round Table "failed" because, within a few years of its foundation, it ran up against the brick wall of Dominion nationalism. Both also argue that after the First World War the Round Table lost its sense of cohesion as well as of purpose, and that some of its leading figures (especially Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr) abandoned Imperialism for a liberal internationalism. Sriram Mehrotra and Deborah Lavin have looked at the early Round Table from a somewhat different perspective, concentrating on Curtis's development of a philosophy of "Commonwealth" which helped to bring about progressive self-government in India and the dependencies, and

foreshadowed the creation of the multi-racial Commonwealth. A third historical tradition, which includes works by G R Allison and Carroll Quigley, has associated the Round Table with the policy of "appeasement", and suggested that in the 1930s the Round Table exercised a powerful influence on British foreign policy. Finally, Leonie Foster has looked at the history of the Australian Round Table groups from their foundation in 1910 until their demise in the 1970s. Taking as her focus the *Round Table* magazine she has elucidated the Australian Round Tablers' views on a wide range of questions, and argued that the *Round Table's* influence on public opinion was significant. On the question of Dominion nationalism she has argued that the Australians gave priority to Australian interests, but that the incompatibility between British and Australian interests only slowly became apparent.

This thesis is closest in model to Leonie Foster's work. It aims to provide a history of the London Round Table group, and takes as its focus the group's rôle as an editorial committee for the *Round Table* magazine. Utilising the manuscript sources left by a number of the original Round Tablers, and benefiting from access to the Round Table's office papers, it seeks to explain as well as to describe the Round Tablers' views on a wide variety of Imperial and international problems. It concentrates on the making of Round Table policy, on the rôle of individual members and the dynamics of the group. It is primarily an intellectual history, seeking to reconstruct the mentalité of the early Round Tablers, and to clarify the changes in their views as a result of confrontation with the challenges posed by Imperial and international politics. Nevertheless, it is also a political history, seeking to assess the Round Table's rôle as a pressure group, particularly in the

field of Anglo-Dominion relations, but also in other areas of policy. It tries to elucidate the Round Tablers' aims and methods and to describe their views of the political process, as well as attempting to answer the difficult question of influence.

This thesis is not a history of the Round Table organisation as a whole. It touches on the histories of the Dominion groups only where these seem relevant to the theme. There are a number of reasons, including limitations of space and the author's incompetence. The Dominion groups enjoyed a semi-autonomous existence, and the Canadian, South African and New Zealand groups are undoubtedly deserving of treatment along the lines followed by Leonie Foster in Australia. Again, this thesis covers the Round Tablers' views on British politics and on financial and economic questions only where this seems necessary. A similar set of reasons apply. The main focus of this thesis is on problems of international and Imperial politics. While the *Round Table's* coverage of financial and economic questions, in particular, is interesting and deserving of study, it is largely a separate topic. Perhaps one of the most striking conclusions might be the limited extent to which financial and economic considerations were held to influence British Imperial and foreign policy. One further limitation of this thesis is that it is primarily a study of the Round Table as a group, and not of individual Round Tablers. The members of the Round Table had many interests in common, but many interests apart. Again, it has seemed necessary to touch on these only where they have been relevant to the question under discussion.

The main part of the thesis is divided into ten chapters. The first gives a brief outline of the history of the group, and explores

the extent to which it sought to use the *Round Table* magazine as a vehicle for its collective views. An examination of contemporary and historical assessments of the group suggests some of the many ways in which the group has been viewed, and notes a wide divergence on the question of influence. A short section seeks to elucidate some of the questions raised, and to indicate possible lines of progress.

The second chapter looks in more detail at the origins of the Round Table in Milner's South African "Kindergarten", outlining Milner's political and intellectual legacy, and examining the "Kindergarten's" rôle in the unification of South Africa. A section on the "Imperial problem" seeks to explain why it was that the Round Tablers adopted an optimistic evaluation of Dominion nationalism, and suggests that, in the Edwardian period at least, Dominion nationalism and Imperial federalism generally worked in the same direction. A brief description of the Round Table's founding aims is followed by an assessment of its initial strategy. In contrast to the assumption of many historians, it is argued that the Round Tablers sought to bring about constitutional change by acting on public opinion rather than on a handful of well-placed politicians. Their notion of public opinion was admittedly limited and élitist, but it is suggested that this was by no means unusual. Again in contrast to earlier assumptions, the extent of disagreement between Curtis and others in the group is noted, even at such an early stage. A final section on the "original Moot" looks at the personalities and careers of the early Round Tablers, suggesting some of the ways in which these affected the dynamics of the group and the extent of its influence.

Chapter Three looks at the Round Table "movement" and again emphasises the differences between Curtis and other members of the group. There was a broad consensus on the eventual need for some form of Imperial reconstruction, but this tended to disappear once the details of a scheme emerged. Curtis's attempts to produce a philosophy of Imperialism initially exacerbated the problem. Perhaps more importantly, there was a strong body of opinion in the group which rejected Curtis's hostility to Imperial co-operation, and which also believed that a longer-term strategy was necessary. Nevertheless, it is argued that it was the outbreak of war which put paid to Curtis's efforts, by magnifying the disagreements over co-operation, transforming Dominion attitudes and (eventually) removing the main argument for union. The 1917 Imperial Cabinet and Conference is seen as a pivotal episode, because it appeared at the time to signal a decisive step towards constitutional unity.

Chapters Four and Five examine the Round Tablers' ideas and their attempts to influence policy in the periods 1910-14 and 1914-22 respectively. It is argued that in the earlier period the Round Tablers were relatively marginal political figures, and that they achieved little success in influencing decisions in Britain. The group's inability to evolve coherent policies on some of the major issues of the day (such as tariff reform and Ireland) is noted, as is the initial conservatism of the group's views on India and the dependencies. By contrast, the years 1916-22 saw many of the Round Tablers moving into positions of considerable power. Nevertheless, the group was unable to make much progress on the central issue of Anglo-Dominion relations. Where members of the Round Table were influential was in smoothing the

course of Imperial retreat, in India, Ireland and Egypt. In all three cases, examination of Round Table views reveals a sudden shift in perspectives, brought about by a realisation of the weakness of Britain's position. Once some equivalent shift in British policy became inevitable, the Round Tablers helped to effect it by making out a persuasive case for change. They also helped to limit it, by portraying concessions as the natural outcome of British political ideals, and by insisting on full Imperial control of the process.

The rôle of the Round Table group between the wars is examined in Chapter Six. The need for some new strategy to bring about Imperial union is emphasised, but so too is the extent to which even Curtis's fiercest critics continued to believe in the possibility and necessity of some form of union. It is argued that, if anything, the group was more cohesive than before, despite the fact that individual members sometimes went off at tangents. The development of new spheres of influence is examined, and it is suggested that the range of the Round Tablers' influence was at least greater than before 1914.

Chapters Seven and Eight again look at the Round Tablers' ideas on specific problems of Imperial and foreign policy, and the extent to which they sought or were able to act as a pressure group. Their attitudes towards constitutional developments in Anglo-Dominion relations were again remarkably optimistic: indeed, they both anticipated and supported the new equality between Britain and the Dominions symbolised by the Balfour Report. The Round Tablers themselves interpreted these changes as a necessary reassurance to Dominion opinion, which would enable those who believed in Imperial unity to build on surer foundations. On India, Ireland and the Middle

East the Round Table again adopted a line of conciliation and cautious reform, which led the group to support British concessions, but not to argue for them in advance. "Commonwealth" came into its own as a progressive ideology of Imperialism, helping to disarm the critics of Empire but also to counteract the influence of "diehards" whom the Round Tablers saw as an equal danger. The practical implications of "Commonwealth" were few: it was an ideological tool, not a political programme.

The Round Tablers' belief in the necessity of Imperial unity in foreign policy brought them into conflict with much of British policy between the wars. Kerr in particular, but to a lesser extent the Round Table as a whole, now saw the United States as the key to an "Oceanic" alliance. The Round Table was highly critical of the Treaty of Versailles, doubtful of the value of the League, and hostile towards any British entanglement in Europe. From 1919 onwards the Round Table urged a combination of "Oceanic" withdrawal and conciliation towards Germany, which anticipated later "appeasement". In the mid-1930s the policy was still strongly supported by Dawson and Kerr/Lothian but not by other Round Tablers. Lothian changed tack at the time of the Austrian crisis, and the Round Table as a whole can safely be discounted as an influence on Chamberlain's policy.

Chapter Nine examines the Round Table's policy during and immediately after the Second World War, and concludes that the late 1940s saw a crisis of Empire in which many of the assumptions which underlay the early Round Table project were discarded. The idea of Imperial unity in defence and foreign policy was itself now rejected. The reason, it is argued, is that Britain now looked to America for the

framework of its security. There was a revival of Imperial purpose in Africa and the Caribbean, but the independence of India and the London Declaration (which the Round Table supported) were recognised as transforming the nature of the Commonwealth.

Chapter Ten studies the Round Table's views of the postwar world. Atlanticism is again an important theme, but there were few illusions as to the unequal nature of the "special relationship". The *Round Table's* coverage of decolonisation again highlights a vision of Commonwealth which was responsive to change, but still fundamentally conservative. A conflict between older and younger generations of Round Tablers appears especially in attitudes towards South Africa and Rhodesia. Re-examination of the value of the Commonwealth led to a new emphasis on diversity rather than unity, and on the Commonwealth's rôle as a "bridge" rather than as a "unit of power".

Two characteristics of Round Table thinking stand out: tenacity and adaptability. Both derived from a belief in the Empire/Commonwealth as a valuable end in itself, and one worth preserving. Through the *Round Table* and elsewhere, the Round Tablers sought to put forward an Imperial or Commonwealth view which was loyal to this higher unity and not just to British interests. This was unusual in Britain, and undoubtedly the main reason why the Round Table was not able to exercise a more continuous influence on British policy. Successive British governments were unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to translate the idealism of the Round Tablers' vision into a reality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	iii
1. The Round Table in History	1
2. The Founders	25
3. The Round Table "Movement"	64
4. Problems of Empire and Foreign Policy, 1910-14	111
5. Problems of War and Adjustment, 1914-22	157
6. The Round Table between the Wars	214
7. Problems of Empire and Commonwealth, 1919-39	257
8. Problems of Foreign Policy, 1919-39	316
9. War and Adjustment, 1939-49	360
10. The Round Table and the Post-War Commonwealth	402
11. Conclusions	446
<i>Appendix A: Round Table Editors</i>	450
<i>Appendix B: Members of the London Moot before 1981</i>	451
<i>Appendix C: Round Table Coverage, by Subject, 1910-66</i>	454
<i>Appendix D: Round Table Articles, by Author, 1910-66</i>	455
<i>Appendix E: The London Moot before 1966: Biographical Notes</i>	456
<i>Appendix F: Round Table Authors (Where Known)</i>	469
<i>Appendix G: Round Table Authors (Index)</i>	548
<i>Bibliography</i>	558

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONSMANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Brand Papers	Brand Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Brand (followed by box number)
Coupland Papers	Coupland Papers, Rhodes House, MSS Brit. Emp. s 403 (followed by box, file and fol numbers)
Curtis Papers	Curtis Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Curtis (followed by box and fol numbers)
Dawson Papers	Dawson Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Dawson (followed by box and fol numbers)
Grigg Papers	Grigg Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Microfilm (followed by film number) (Microfilm copies of originals in Douglas Library, Kingston, Ontario)
Lothian Papers	Lothian Papers, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, GD 40/17 (followed by box and fol numbers)
Milner Papers	Milner Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Milner Dep. (followed by box and fol numbers)
Oliver Papers	Oliver Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, MSS Acc. 7726 (followed by box and fol numbers)
RT Papers	Round Table Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Eng. Hist. (followed by box and fol numbers)
RT (O) Papers	Uncatalogued papers transferred to Bodleian, 1994
Selborne Papers	Selborne Papers, Bodleian Library, MSS Selborne (followed by box and fol numbers)

All other manuscript sources cited in full.

JOURNALS

<i>Can Hist Rev</i>	<i>Canadian Historical Review</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>Econ HR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>Hist Journal</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>International Affairs</i>
<i>J Contemp Hist</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i>
<i>JCPS</i>	<i>Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies</i>
<i>JICH</i>	<i>Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History</i>
<i>NZ J of Hist</i>	<i>New Zealand Journal of History</i>
<i>Proc RCI</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute</i>
<i>RT</i>	<i>Round Table</i>

## 1. THE ROUND TABLE IN HISTORY

*The Round Table* is the name given to a quarterly review of international, Imperial and Commonwealth affairs which first appeared in November 1910 and which, after a brief demise in the early 1980s, is still published today. Originally the magazine was an offshoot of a Round Table study movement, with branches in Britain, Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The purpose of these groups was to discuss Imperial problems and their solutions, using material supplied by the central London group, or "Moot". The Moot preceded both the magazine and the study groups, and created both with the "one and only purpose", as a fund-raising document of 1913 put it, of orchestrating a movement "to bring about the closer union of the British Empire".<sup>1</sup>

The Moot had its origins in "Milner's Kindergarten", the group of young British officials and administrators whom Lord Milner recruited after the South African war of 1899-1902. Initially just a close-knit fraternity of Oxford graduates, the "Kindergarten" (like the later Moot) had no formal constitution. There has often been some confusion as to its membership. Robert (later Lord) Brand recalled that the key members were himself, Lionel Curtis, John Dove, (Sir) Patrick Duncan, Richard Feetham, Lionel Hitchens, J F (Peter) Perry and Geoffrey Robinson (who in 1917 changed his name to Dawson). Other, more peripheral members were (Sir) Herbert Baker, John Buchan (later Lord Tweedsmuir), (Sir) George Craik, (Sir) William Marris, (Sir) James (later Lord) Meston and the Hon Hugh Wyndham (later

---

1 "Round Table Statement", 1913, RT Papers c 778, fols 195-208.

Lord Leconfield).<sup>1</sup> Already the members of the "Kindergarten" called themselves "the Moot", partly by way of reference to the "Anglo-Saxonism" which they and Milner espoused, partly to indicate their rôle as a forum for the discussion of "moot", ie debatable and undecided, points. The name "Round Table", with similar connotations, also appears at this stage: in 1906 John Buchan (now back in England) paid tribute to "the brilliant minds of the Round Table".<sup>2</sup>

Under Milner's successor Lord Selborne, the "Kindergarten" - now joined by Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian) and (Sir) Dougal Malcolm - played an important part in the movement leading to South African unification. Even before this object was accomplished, the Moot was looking further afield. As Curtis wrote to Selborne in 1907,

"It begins to dawn on one that South Africa is a microcosm and much that we thought peculiar to it is equally true of the Empire itself . . . . When we have done all we can do and should do for South Africa it may be that we shall have the time and the training to begin some work of the same kind in respect of Imperial Relations."<sup>3</sup>

The following year, Curtis was more explicit about the new objective.

"It becomes more and more apparent every day to my mind that the various countries included in the Empire must come to some definite business arrangement for the support and control of Imperial defence and foreign policy or the Empire must break up."<sup>4</sup>

- 
- 1 Brand, Note on "Kindergarten", 9 Aug 1958, RT Papers c 867, fols 51-54. For biographical notes, see Appendix E. Robinson is hereafter referred to as Dawson throughout.
  - 2 Buchan, *The Lodge in the Wilderness* (Edinburgh, 1906), Preface.
  - 3 Curtis to Selborne, 18 Oct 1907, Selborne Papers 71, fol 127.
  - 4 Curtis to Milner, 31 Oct 1908, Milner Papers 195, fols 155-58.

At a series of meetings in South Africa and Britain during 1909-10, what Milner called "Curtis's scheme"<sup>1</sup> was given concrete shape, and the Round Table organization was born. Duncan, Feetham and Wyndham stayed on in South Africa and provided the core of the Round Table group there; Brand, Craik, Curtis, Dawson, Dove, Hichens, Kerr and Malcolm returned to England, where they constituted the nucleus of the metropolitan Moot. Besides Milner and Selborne, others who were active in the London group during its early years were Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Lovat, F S Oliver, Leo Amery, (Sir) Arthur Steel-Maitland, (Sir) Edward Grigg (later Lord Altrincham), (Sir) Reginald Coupland and (Sir) Alfred Zimmern.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the early members of the Moot saw the purpose of the Round Table as being to work towards the creation of "an Imperial government constitutionally responsible to all the electors of the Empire, and with power to act directly on the individual citizens".<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless there were, from the beginning, different views as to how this objective should be attained, the powers which such a government should exercise, and the time-scale within which the movement's aims might be achieved.

Curtis was employed by the Moot to produce an argument for "closer union" which would be acceptable to the London and overseas groups. His drafts provided a focus for Round Table activities for the first half-decade. But he was ultimately unsuccessful. As H V Hodson (editor of the

1 Milner's diaries, 26 Aug 1909 and 4 Sept 1909, Milner Papers 80.

2 For a fuller list, see Appendix B.

3 Minutes of RT Meeting, 15 to 18 Jan 1910, Lothian Papers 11, fols 7-11.

*Round Table* from 1934 to 1939) has recently emphasised, Curtis's "federal aspirations" remained "an agenda to be discussed, not a plan to be promoted".<sup>1</sup>

Curtis never abandoned his faith in federalism. With few exceptions, his colleagues were and remained more ambivalent. Kerr/Lothian was a prominent advocate of federalism at various stages of an illustrious career, but, as Brand later emphasised, he "certainly never held the fixed unwavering faith of Lionel".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Moot as a whole was reluctant to abandon the ultimate objective which had inspired the creation of the *Round Table*, and an (undefined) "organic union" of the Empire appeared in statements of the Moot's aims as late as 1945.

Even while Curtis was trying to cajole his colleagues into supporting his own version of federalism, the *Round Table* magazine was enjoying a life of its own, as the vehicle for the Moot's opinions on a wide range of domestic, Imperial and international issues. After the First World War there were many discussions on whether and how to revitalise the *Round Table* "movement". But there was never any question of closing down the magazine. As an instrument for broadcasting "instructive ideas to the world at large"<sup>3</sup> the *Round Table* was invaluable.

Like *The Times* and the BBC, the *Round Table* aspired to a reputation for Olympian judgment. Potential subscribers to the magazine in 1947 were

- 1 Hodson, foreword to Curtis, *World War: Its Cause and Cure* (London, 1992 edition), p ii.
- 2 Brand to Morrah, 28 Sept 1948, Brand Papers, box 171.
- 3 Curtis to Sir Arthur Salter (draft), 17 Apr 1930, Lothian Papers 251, fols 596-99.

promised "a clear true picture of world events" and "the factual background to news with authority and without party bias".<sup>1</sup> The provision of information was an important part of the magazine's rôle; but information was balanced by, and delivered in the context of, analysis and argument which, if seldom overtly partisan, was rarely uncommitted.

Until 1966, all articles in the magazine were anonymous. Almost half of each issue consisted of "chronicles": initially, from Britain and from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, where sections of the local Round Table groups acted as editorial sub-committees until the late 1960s. After the First World War, the *Round Table* published additional regular articles from correspondents in Ireland, India and the United States; after the Second, also from Northern Ireland (appended to the British "chronicle"), Pakistan (from 1947), Central Africa and (briefly) East Africa. In theory these "chronicles" were meant to be especially unpartisan, although in practice it was recognised that "no writer who is capable of independent thought is likely to be wholly free of bias".<sup>2</sup>

The remainder of each issue consisted of "policy" articles either written or commissioned by the Moot. In time, the leading article came to bear a special editorial imprimatur. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions which were introduced as such, all articles were hammered into an editorially consistent shape, by a judicious selection of contributors and a sometimes fundamental revision of the text by the editor and his committee. Unsolicited articles were rarely published, and there was no

1 Advertisement in *The Sunday Times*, 21 Sept 1947.

2 Morrah to L F G Anthony, nd [Aug 1959] (Rhodesias file), RT (O) Papers.

provision for readers to criticise views expressed in the publication through letters or other means. As a result, the magazine was able to convey an identity of viewpoint both as between different articles in the same issue and as between articles on the same subject over a period of time. As one editor put it, privately, in 1933,

". . . the position is totally different to that of the 'Nineteenth Century' or any other review. Our articles are anonymous, and the Round Table expresses its own view in them, whoever writes them. It is this characteristic which gives us most of our influence".<sup>1</sup>

The core of the London group in the interwar period, as before, was the "Kindergarten". Grigg and (to a lesser extent) Coupland retained a strong interest in the work of the Round Table, but most of the other early non-"Kindergarten" members either drifted away or resigned. Their places were taken by new members. Percy Horsfall was recruited in the early 1920s; H V Hodson, (Sir) Ivison Macadam and (Sir) John Maud (later Lord Redcliffe-Maud) in the early 1930s; Lord Hailey and Vincent Harlow later in the decade; Henry (later Lord) Brooke and Dermot Morrah in the early 1940s; Sir Olaf Caroe, Nicholas Mansergh and Denzil Marris in the late 1940s; Sir Oliver (later Lord) Franks in the 1950s. Further members were recruited from 1960 onwards. Hodson later remarked that the names of his older colleagues "sound like a roll-call of the 'great and good' of the 1930s".<sup>2</sup> The description is equally apt in any subsequent decade. Certainly, the Moot contained many individuals who were eminent and influential in a wide variety of fields.

---

1 Dove to Brand, 23 June 1933, Lothian Papers 276, fols 608-11.

2 Hodson, "The Round Table, 1910-81", RT, Oct 1981, p 308.

### Contemporary Assessments

The *Round Table* quickly established an enviable reputation as the leading review of Imperial politics, notable both for its informative "chronicle" articles and for the readability and judiciousness of its "policy" contributions. The *Round Table* archives contain many cuttings from other newspapers and magazines of all political shades (and from all parts of the Empire) commending individual articles or the magazine as a whole. The *Daily Chronicle* thought it "indispensable to all serious students of politics"; the *Nation* praised it as "careful, weighty and responsible"; and the *Pall Mall Gazette* declared that "there is no publication that surpasses it in clearness of thought and statement".<sup>1</sup>

One of the objects of the Moot in producing the magazine was to reach "the thinking and reading class of people who really make public opinion".<sup>2</sup> In this the Moot appears to have been relatively successful. J C Smuts told Curtis in 1921 that "the *Round Table* is the one thing of its kind which is read by nearly everyone who determines public policy or originates public opinion".<sup>3</sup> The Moot was especially keen to reach Dominion opinion, which it aimed to do at one remove, via the editors of local papers. Again there were grounds for claiming success. In Australia, for instance, 57 papers published in Victoria alone carried précis of *Round Table* articles

---

1 "Newspaper Criticisms of the *Round Table* Quarterly" [1917], RT Papers c 845, fols 131-34; cf "The *Round Table*: Opinions of the Press throughout the Dominions" [1913], *ibid.*, fols 175-79.

2 [Curtis,] "Memorandum" (Auckland, 1910), RT Papers c 776, fol 62.

3 Curtis to A J Glazebrook, 2 Sept 1921, RT Papers c 796, fols 134-40.

in 1918<sup>1</sup>; and in 1949 it was reported that many papers still relied on the *Round Table* both for information and opinion.<sup>2</sup>

The *Round Table* was, for its time, unique. It aspired, and was relied upon by many, to convey British views to the Dominions, Dominion views to Britain, and an Imperial or Commonwealth view to all. Its authority in foreign countries was important, also. The Moot was especially keen to secure a large circulation for the magazine in the United States. Curtis thought that its influence was "probably greater in Europe than in England", partly because (like *The Times*) it was believed to possess a peculiar insight into government thinking.<sup>3</sup> Some continental journals - such as *Le Monde Français* - regularly reprinted whole articles from each issue.

Soon after the appearance of the first *Round Table*, Rodolphe Lemieux, the former Canadian minister, wrote to G M Wrong that "there is an inner circle in that organisation - I know it, I feel it".<sup>4</sup> The anonymity of the *Round Table* perhaps added to contemporaries' interest in that "inner circle". Often, outside commentators saw more cohesion and homogeneity in the group than did the Round Tablers themselves; but, as D C Watt pointed

- 1 T H Laby, "Report of the Activities of the Round Table in Australia during 1918", June 1919 (Melbourne file), RT (O) Papers.
- 2 D K Picken to Curtis, 18 Nov 1949, *ibid*.
- 3 Curtis to Sir A Salter, 17 Apr 1930 (draft), Lothian Papers 251, fols 596-99.
- 4 Quoted by James Eayrs, "The Round Table Movement in Canada, 1909-20", *Can Hist Rev*, Vol XXXVIII (1957), pp 1-20.

out, "in a sense they had only themselves to thank".<sup>1</sup>

The word which most often came to contemporaries' minds when describing the Round Table, and particularly its "Kindergarten" members, was "idealist". This adjective was used not only in its philosophical sense, of a world-view in which ideas were seen as more powerful than material things - which was, indeed, the Round Tablers' belief - but also in the vernacular sense, of a character or disposition which was high-minded, disinterested, and determined to bring reality into conformity with ideals. J G Lockhart described them in 1928 as "full of the most excellent intentions", possessed of "tidy minds", and therefore "ever at war with the incorrigible intellectual sloppiness of the Briton".<sup>2</sup> Less charitable critics suggested that the Round Tablers were out of touch with reality, even crankish. The dowager Lady Milner, whose disapproval of her husband's protégés amounted almost to hatred, described them in 1939 as "highbrow noodles".<sup>3</sup>

"Idealism" was not always a guarantee of serious consideration, let alone a fair hearing. Nevertheless, it is striking how often the Round Tablers' opponents paid tribute to their intellectual abilities, and to their rôle in gingering up the Imperial debate. The Round Tablers were clearly a force to be reckoned with, in a way that Philpott Williams and

1 Watt, "The Men of the Round Table", *RT*, July 1969, p 328.

2 Janitor [J G Lockhart], *The Feet of the Young Men* (London, 1928), pp 171 and 173. At the time of his death, Lockhart was working on Curtis's biography.

3 Lady Milner to Grigg, 28 July 1939, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1005.

his Imperial Organization Society (which put forward proposals very similar to Curtis's) were not. Richard Jebb thought that "Curtis has achieved a wonderful success . . . in organising discussion of the whole [Imperial] question . . . and the Round Table keeps up its level admirably".<sup>1</sup> Henri Bourassa was more effusive. In his view, the Round Table was "the most active and interesting" imperialist group, and Curtis's work "even marked with a logical trend of reasoning . . . rarely to be found in Anglo-Saxon productions".<sup>2</sup> Similar appreciation of the Round Table's efforts to open up discussion was expressed by writers such as H Duncan Hall and Sir Keith Hancock, and by politicians such as Sir Robert Borden and Jan Smuts.

At the very least, then, contemporaries credited the Round Tablers with an important rôle in the debate on Imperial relations, that of providing (in Hancock's words) a "centre of reference, even when the reference is critical".<sup>3</sup> Was it possible to go further, and suggest that the Round Tablers, as a group, exercised real power? Some contemporaries clearly thought so.

The idea that the Round Tablers not only sought but exercised power behind the scenes existed even before many of the Round Tablers moved into positions of power under Lloyd George. Richard Jebb gave currency to the idea in his *Britannic Question* of 1913. But it was under Lloyd George that the myth really took hold. The Prime Minister himself remarked in 1921 that the Round Table

---

1 Jebb to Fabian Ware, 2 June 1912, Jebb Papers.

2 Bourassa, *Independence or Imperial Partnership?* (Montreal, 1916), pp 5-6.

3 Hancock to Curtis, 23 Sept 1937, Curtis Papers 11, fol 146.

"is a very powerful combination - in its way perhaps the most powerful in the country. Each member of the Group brings to its deliberations certain definite and important qualities, and behind the scenes they have much power and influence".<sup>1</sup>

Lloyd George was perhaps not the most reliable witness, both because he was himself responsible for elevating the Round Tablers and because he was renowned for his volatility. Nevertheless, Sir Maurice (Lord) Hankey came to a similar conclusion, counting the Round Table "among the most influential" of contemporary "political congeries".<sup>2</sup> The Round Tablers' purchase on Lloyd George's administration was by no means universally welcomed. Sir Henry Wilson thought their influence "poisonous"<sup>3</sup>, while the *Morning Post* (which was unsure "whether the Round Table swallowed Mr Lloyd George or Mr Lloyd George swallowed the Round Table"<sup>4</sup>) described them as "a . . . palace-guard of idealists, who could be trusted by a sort of spiritual perversion to take a line injurious to British interests on every issue".<sup>5</sup> Joseph Caillaux took the opposite view, that the Round Table was a group of aristocratic nationalists, scheming "to restore simultaneously the tottering power of their caste and Great Britain's world supremacy".<sup>6</sup>

- 
- 1 *Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After* (London, 1933), p 330.
  - 2 S Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, Volume 1* (London, 1970), pp 422-23.
  - 3 R R James, *Memoirs of a Conservative* [J C C Davidson] (London, 1969), p 138.
  - 4 *Morning Post*, 15 Nov 1922, cutting in RT Papers c 811, fol 29.
  - 5 *Morning Post*, 12 June 1923, *ibid*, fol 30.
  - 6 Caillaux, *Whither France? Whither Europe?* (tr K M Armstrong, London, 1923), p 5.

Once acquired, the Round Table's reputation as a "cabal" or "camarilla" or "junta" (the latter Sir Wilfrid Laurier's description) was hard to shake off. To some degree, it clung to the Round Tablers throughout the 1920s and '30s. It was given a new lease of life by the prominent support which Dawson and Lothian gave to the policy of "appeasement". Most contemporaries failed to distinguish between individual Round Tablers and the Round Table as a whole. Lord Davies, for instance, described the Round Table in 1935 as an "influential group", engaged in "deliberate sabotage" of the League of Nations and collective security.<sup>1</sup>

The notion that the Moot exercised a powerful "backstairs" influence was held by sympathisers as well as detractors. As late as the 1960s, the members of the Sydney group were comparing unfavourably their own influence with that of the London Moot<sup>2</sup>, while the New Zealand members apparently saw themselves "as reporting . . . to a group of wise and powerful men in London".<sup>3</sup>

This emphasis by others on the collective influence of the Moot naturally begs the question: how did the Round Tablers themselves assess their impact?

- 
- 1 Davies, "'Round Table' or World Commonwealth?", *Nineteenth Century*, Vol CXVII (1935), pp 47-55.
  - 2 D MacCallum, "The Round Table", 17 Mar 1965 (Sydney file), RT (O) Papers.
  - 3 L Beaton to Sir R Wade-Gery, 14 June 1965 (Beaton file), RT (O) Papers.

Thomas Jones noted in his diary in 1936 that "all the Round Tablers are good at collecting any credit there is going, like the Scotch".<sup>1</sup> This assertion is not easy to reconcile with the reticence of many of the leading Round Tablers. (One American journalist, sent to interview Curtis in 1949, found him "so overwhelmed with his own unimportance that there was almost no interview".<sup>2</sup>) Indeed, Round Tablers' claims of specifically Round Table influence were, in fact, few and far between. A fund-raising circular of 1920 made some more or less minor claims, ranging from the decision to include foreign affairs within the purview of the Imperial Conference in 1911 to the decision to call an Imperial War Cabinet and Conference in 1917.<sup>3</sup> A draft article by John Dove for the journal *Overseas*, written in 1924, made the rather more important claim that the Round Table was the author of the 1919 reforms in India.<sup>4</sup> Curtis asserted that his *Round Table* article of June 1921 "inspired the Irish Treaty . . . and led to the creation of the Irish Free State".<sup>5</sup> Curtis also claimed that he had not only popularised but discovered the term "Commonwealth" as a more fitting description for an Empire whose "function in the world was to promote the government of men by themselves".<sup>6</sup> Other claims of Round

- 
- 1 T Jones, *A Diary with Letters, 1931-50* (Oxford, 1954), p 173.
  - 2 Kathleen A Schiller, "Lionel Curtis - the Man", *Freedom and Union* (Oct 1949), pp 7-8.
  - 3 Draft of fund-raising circular, [1920,] Brand Papers, box 42.
  - 4 John Dove, "The Round Table: A Mystery Probed", 18 Dec 1924, *ibid*, box 70.
  - 5 Curtis to Macadam, 6 July 1953 (ed ctee file), RT (O) Papers.
  - 6 Hancock, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, Vol 1: Problems of Nationality, 1918-36* (London, 1937), p 54.

Table influence are more difficult to find. Perhaps the Moot became embarrassed by the rather extravagant reputation which its members had acquired by the 1920s. Nevertheless, it is significant that the Round Tablers returned again and again to the lessons of South African unification, the one episode in which those who formed the core of the later Round Table acted as a coherent group, and for which they were almost universally given credit.

#### Historical Assessments

"Surely it is a waste of time to write a long book on the Round Table", Curtis exclaimed in 1953, after reading John Conway's Harvard thesis - a study of the *Round Table's* early coverage of Imperial organisation, Ireland and India.<sup>1</sup> What particularly galled him was Conway's suggestion that the *Round Table* had performed "volte-faces" on India and Ireland, and was therefore not to be reckoned an influence on government policy. Curtis thought Conway's work "positively misleading". He changed his mind after meeting Conway, and even suggested that he might make a useful *Round Table* correspondent.<sup>2</sup>

Curtis's comment was, indeed, uncharacteristic. Of all the Round Tablers, he was perhaps the most convinced of the historical value of their work. In his private correspondence, references to "the future historian"

---

1 Conway, "The Round Table: A Study in Liberal Imperialism" (Harvard PhD thesis, 1951).

2 Curtis to Macadam, 6 July 1953; Curtis to Morrah, 5 Aug 1953 (ed ctee file), RT (O) Papers.

abound. In 1933, for instance, he criticised Lothian's decision not to attend the Toronto Commonwealth Relations conference: "Consider for a moment the view which some historian of our movement 50 years hence would take".<sup>1</sup> The Round Tablers were generally conscientious in saving records for posterity. Initially it was thought "that our history can be satisfactorily written only by one of our own body, who knows the movement from the inside".<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately none of the Moot had the time to devote to such a task, although in 1981 Hodson wrote an article for the *Round Table*, which remains the most authoritative introduction to the subject.<sup>3</sup>

Conway was the first of a number of North American scholars to investigate different aspects of the Round Table's history. D C Ellinwood followed him in 1962 with a study of Milner's "Kindergarten" and the movement for imperial federation to 1919. Although generally sympathetic, Ellinwood concluded that the strength of Dominion nationalism made the group's "failure" inevitable. Like Conway, he emphasised the central rôle of Milner.<sup>4</sup> G R Allison submitted a more wide-ranging thesis in 1964, again placing the Round Table firmly in the tradition of "new imperialism", but emphasising its influence on the policy of "appeasement" (an influence which he condemned vigorously).<sup>5</sup> Like Conway and Ellinwood, Allison relied

- 
- 1 Curtis to Lothian, 15 Apr 1933, Lothian Papers 263, fols 245-50.
  - 2 Morrah to Amery, 3 Dec 1951 (ed ctee file), RT (O) Papers.
  - 3 Hodson, "The Round Table, 1910-81", *RT*, Oct 1981, pp 308-33.
  - 4 Ellinwood, "Milner's Kindergarten, the British Round Table group and the Movement for Imperial Reform" (Washington PhD thesis, 1962).
  - 5 Allison, "Imperialism and Appeasement: A Study in the Ideas of the Round Table Group" (Harvard PhD thesis, 1964).

entirely on published sources. All three scholars were unsure of the composition of the group, and included many non-Round Tablers.

By the early 1960s it was clear that no member of the Moot would be able to undertake a history of the movement, and the Round Table archives were opened to scholars. Ironically, one of the first to benefit was Carroll Quigley. Quigley had already conceived an intense dislike of the Round Table, which he saw as the "inner core" of a Rhodesian-Milnerite "secret society", with branches all over the English-speaking world. In 1949 he had written a book on the "Anglo-American Establishment" (not actually published until 1981) in which he put forward this view, and asserted that the Round Tablers were "persons whose lives have been a disaster to our way of life".<sup>1</sup> A brief rummage through the Round Table files merely confirmed his views. Consequently, he published an article (re-)affirming his belief that the Round Table was "founded by Milner . . . to create an immense nexus of influence and patronage", and claiming that it was "unquestionably the most influential group in British political life for at least 30 years".<sup>2</sup> A second, unpublished article made the more specific claim that the Round Table was "the most significant aberrant influence on the foreign policy of Chamberlain and Halifax", and that the group favoured a large measure of "colonial appeasement" as a step towards "partnership" with Nazi Germany.<sup>3</sup> Macadam

- 
- 1 Quigley, *The Anglo-American Establishment from Rhodes to Cliveden* (New York, 1981), p xi.
  - 2 Quigley, "The Round Table in Canada, 1908-38", *Can Hist Rev*, Vol XLIII (1962), pp 204-24.
  - 3 Quigley, "The African Issue in the Appeasement Program, 1937-39", copy in Brand Papers, box 171.

thought him "crazy".<sup>1</sup>

In 1968 another American, Walter Nimocks, published a more sober study of Milner's "Kindergarten", making extensive use of the Milner and Dawson papers, as well as more limited use of the Lothian and Round Table collections. Nimocks was able to paint a more vivid picture than Ellinwood. But in basic interpretation he differed little: he saw the Round Tablers primarily as Milnerites, and again emphasised the "failure" of the movement, "with only the quarterly magazine to mark the fact that it had ever existed". In contrast to Quigley, Nimocks believed that "as a group" the Round Table "had little influence on Edwardian affairs".<sup>2</sup> Nimocks presumably believed that the Round Table had even less influence thereafter, since his narrative stopped abruptly in 1914.

The Canadian historian John Kendle took the story further, with his study of *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union*, published in 1975. Kendle had already thrown new light on the early history of the movement, in two articles on Curtis's activities in New Zealand in 1910, another on the Moot's espousal of UK devolution, and a chapter on the group's preparations for the 1911 Imperial Conference.<sup>3</sup> In his longer study, Kendle made extensive use of the available sources in Britain and Canada to

- 1 Macadam to Brand, 27 Aug 1962, *ibid.*
- 2 Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men: The Kindergarten in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (London, 1968), pp 219 and viii.
- 3 Kendle, "The Round Table, New Zealand and the Imperial Conference of 1911", *JCPS*, Vol III no 2 (1965), pp 104-17; "The Round Table Movement, Lionel Curtis and the Formation of the New Zealand Groups", *NZ J of Hist*, Vol 1 no 1 (1967), pp 33-50; "The Round Table Movement and 'Home Rule All Round'", *Hist Journal*, Vol XI no 2 (1968), pp 332-53; *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences, 1887-1911* (London, 1967), ch 7.

produce a well-balanced and still valuable account of the Round Table's early years. As his title suggests, Kendle's main interest was in the fate of the Round Table's original, federal, purpose, although he included chapters on "Home Rule All Round" and on India, and a somewhat laconic chapter on "the twilight years" after the First World War. In his view, the Round Table "ceased to be a movement and *The Round Table* ceased to be a quarterly devoted primarily to empire-commonwealth concerns" after this point.<sup>1</sup>

Although he conceded that Dominion nationalism "can be over-emphasized", Kendle attributed the Round Table's "failure" primarily to the fact that the members of the London group "never really understood dominion feelings". Had they done so, they would have realised that their "major goals, especially imperial federation . . . were probably hopeless aspirations from the beginning". (The same view has recently been put forward by John Eddy and Deryck Schreuder: the "ultimate failure of 'constructive imperialism' was as hopeless as the earlier British mercantile imperial attempts to forge a north-west passage through winter ice".<sup>2</sup>) Perhaps the most valuable legacy of the Round Table was to have "helped demolish the prejudice against granting self-government to India".<sup>3</sup>

- 
- 1 Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto, 1975), p 274.
  - 2 Eddy and Schreuder, "The Edwardian Empire" in *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism* (London and Sydney, 1988), p 45.
  - 3 Kendle, *The Round Table Movement*, pp 301-03.

In an earlier article, Kendle had suggested that the Round Table was, during its early years, an "extremely powerful" group.<sup>1</sup> In his longer work, however, he concluded that

"the influence of the movement . . . has often been exaggerated . . . . On occasion, of course, especially before 1914, the movement, particularly the London group, did have some influence in governmental circles in Great Britain and the dominions . . . . Even so it must be realised that very few of the Round Table members were really influential - in positions of power or with long-time access to powerful men".

Kendle made this statement "only in the context of imperial affairs", and he allowed that a "somewhat different assessment might be required if foreign affairs and the problem of appeasement were being examined".<sup>2</sup>

Since the appearance of Kendle's study, no historian has attempted to dispute the main lines of his argument or to provide yet another "long book" on the Round Table movement as a whole. But the Australian Round Table groups have been the subject of a fascinating study by Leonie Foster which, as Kendle wrote in the foreword, provides "a model for similar work in other parts of the Commonwealth". Foster's work differs from previous studies of the Round Table not only in tackling the history of the local groups, but also in its historical scope - tracing the groups' history from 1910 as far as their demise in the 1970s - and in treating the *Round Table* magazine rather than the "movement" as the primary focus of Round Table activities. Foster emphasised that "Australian and British interests have never been identical", and that in the last resort "the [Australian]

---

1 Kendle, "The Round Table Movement: Lionel Curtis and the Formation of the New Zealand Groups", p 33.

2 Kendle, *The Round Table Movement*, p 305.

articles reflected the primacy of the Australian national interest". Nevertheless, as her study ably demonstrates, there was a broad middle ground in which "native and imperial loyalties mingled happily".<sup>1</sup>

Deborah Lavin's essays on Lionel Curtis have brought vividly to life the character, ideas and methods of the Round Table's leading founder.<sup>2</sup> In Lavin's view, Curtis "propagated the multinational Commonwealth and was . . . the first to explore in any detail the ideal of multiracial Commonwealth" - although the "modern Commonwealth of national entities has turned out to be a far cry from his dream of a supra-national state".<sup>3</sup> Lavin's work casts doubt as well as light on some of the previously accepted nostrums of Round Table historiography, by demonstrating the extent to which "Round Table" work was often Curtis's alone, and the result of some very non-Milnerite influences.

Andrea Bosco and the Lothian Foundation have stimulated reconsideration of the federalist aspects of the Round Table's history by sponsoring a wide range of publications asserting their continuing relevance and (if applied to Europe rather than the Commonwealth) practicability. Bosco's own epistemological studies have credited Curtis

- 
- 1 Foster, *High Hopes: the Men and Motives of the Australian Round Table* (Melbourne, 1986), foreword, p 4 and *passim*.
  - 2 Lavin, "History, Morals and the Politics of the Empire: Lionel Curtis and the Round Table" in J Bossy and P Jupp (eds) *Essays Presented to Michael Roberts* (Belfast, 1976); "Lionel Curtis and the Idea of Commonwealth" in F Madden and D K Fieldhouse (eds) *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth* (London, 1982); "Lionel Curtis and Indian dyarchy" in Andrea Bosco (ed) *The Federal Idea, Volume 1* (London, 1991).
  - 3 Lavin, "Lionel Curtis and the Idea of Commonwealth", p 97.

and Lothian with a coherent federalist philosophy, and an effective critique "of international anarchy and of the appearance of totalitarianism within the nation state". In Bosco's view, the Round Table was mainly significant as "the link between imperial and international federalism". Indeed, at times Bosco appears to argue that Lothian, at least, was a federalist first and an imperialist only second.<sup>1</sup>

Curiously, one aspect of the Round Tablers' history which has received little recent attention is "appeasement". An exception is Kathryn Tidrick's book on *Empire and the English Character*, in which she (like Allison and Quigley) counts all the Round Tablers as "appeasers". Historians who are reluctant to endorse the conspiratorial view of the "Cliveden Set" are, she suggests, perhaps guilty of "succumbing to the same judiciousness which afflicted its supposed members".<sup>2</sup>

### Some Problems

Contemporary and historical assessments of the Round Table have raised a number of important questions, not all of which have found entirely satisfactory answers. Perhaps the most important is, still, the question of the nature and extent of Round Table influence. Allison, Quigley and others have provided one answer; Nimocks and Kendle another. The latter certainly seems more plausible. Yet there remains something

---

1 Bosco, "National Sovereignty and Peace" in J Turner (ed), *The Larger Idea* (London, 1988), pp 108, 121 and 122 (Lothian "regarded federalism as a form to fill with a content"). For Bosco's other works and the Lothian Foundation's publications, see bibliography.

2 Tidrick, *Empire and the English Character* (London, 1990), p 311 note 15 (generally, pp 271 ff).

elusive about the Round Table's influence even in its "movement" stage, as well as a wide field of unexplored endeavour thereafter. As Foster has very pertinently suggested,

"The criteria for 'failure' need closer examination. How can failure of a movement be measured? No results? Unexpected results? Collapse? Length of existence? The ultimate failure of the Round Table members to achieve closer union does not write them off. In the midst of failure they had their successes".'

Influence is, of course, very difficult to quantify even in the case of a single individual. In the case of a movement, a group and a magazine it is well-nigh impossible. The question needs to be broken down if there is any hope of reaching even a tentative answer.

To take the "movement" aspect of the Round Table enterprise first, most historians believe that it was inevitable that the Round Table should have failed. The Round Tablers themselves clearly thought it was not. On what grounds did they base this view? And why did they think that the component parts of the Empire had sufficient interests in common to justify common policies and even common institutions? Again, contemporaries and historians have generally assumed that the Round Table's claim to be a "study" organisation was just a tactical ruse: that, as J G Lockhart put it, "the answers were already written out and reposing in Lionel Curtis's pocket".<sup>2</sup> But was this really the case? Or was imperial federalism itself a "moot" point? If so, in what ways and for what reasons did other Round Tablers disagree with Curtis? And to what extent did the Round Tablers' views develop after 1910?

1 Foster, *op cit*, p 162.

2 Janitor (J G Lockhart), *The Feet of the Young Men* (London, 1928), p 177.

The answers to such questions might help to provide answers to other ones, more immediately germane to the "failure" of the Round Table "movement". At what point, or points, did the Round Tablers themselves recognise imperial federation to be impracticable: before the First World War, during, or after? Did they attribute "failure" primarily to the views of the Dominions, and of the Dominion Round Table groups in particular? What of British views? And what of changes in those circumstances which had led them to embark on the Round Table enterprise in the first place? If the Round Tablers did realise that their movement had "failed", we still need to establish whether they saw "failure" as permanent or merely temporary. This in turn will help to establish whether they re-assessed their aims, or just the means by which they hoped to achieve those aims.

Already it is clear that the dynamics of the Moot itself must be re-examined. Contemporaries generally assumed that it was possible to speak of a Round Table group identity. On the other hand, Nimocks and Kendle have both suggested that that identity faded after the First World War. The problem deserves closer attention. What were the sources of Round Table cohesion before the First World War, and to what extent did they change after? Was agreement easier in some areas than in others, and, if so, why? How important was Round Table membership to individual members of the Moot? Conversely, what did individual members bring to the group? Were some members more dominant than others? And what light can the history of the Moot throw on the careers and intellectual development of individuals who were, in many cases, worthy of study in their own right?

Such questions concerning the internal dynamics of the Moot help to clarify the larger questions concerning the Round Table's activities as a pressure group. Whom did the Round Tablers seek to influence? Were they

primarily concerned with changing political attitudes and policy in the Dominions or did they hope to exert influence in Britain itself? On what level did the Round Tablers seek to operate? Did they seek to bring about a "revolution by dinner party", as John Turner so pithily put it?<sup>1</sup> In other words, were they primarily interested in using "backstairs" influence to change the attitudes of politicians and officials? Or were they primarily concerned to influence "opinion", that amorphous and elusive, yet all-important construct of modern democracy? In either case, how did they seek to do so? And in what contexts and circumstances were they successful?

The Moot's primary activity, certainly after 1916 or so, was running the *Round Table* magazine. The views put forward will therefore help to throw light on the Moot's rôle as a pressure group, and on the circumstances in which it felt either compelled or able to act in such a capacity. Where, then, did those who wrote for the *Round Table* diverge from British policy, and where did they seek to modify it? Where, on the other hand, did they seek to explain and to justify British policy? To the extent that the *Round Table* put forward a coherent view of the Empire/Commonwealth, what light did it throw on the nature of British imperialism in general? Was there, indeed, a distinctive "Round Table" version of imperialism?

Questions of influence are, of course, important; but they are not necessarily all-important. Intentions are often more interesting than results; certainly they help to illuminate the thought-processes of previous generations, to whom in some respects we are so close, yet who, in other respects, inhabited a very different world.

---

1 Turner, "Lord Lothian and His World" in *The Larger Idea* (London, 1988), p 5.

## 2 THE FOUNDERS

The origins and early history of the Round Table have been covered in some detail by Ellinwood, Nimocks, Kendle and other historians.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to cover a certain amount of old ground in order to emphasise, clarify or dispute points which have an important bearing on the subsequent history of the Round Table.

### Alfred Lord Milner

Lord Milner was sometimes referred to as the "leader" of the Round Table, more often as its "chairman". He was especially venerated by the "Kindergarten" - who referred to him as "H.E." or "his triple X" - but he was also responsible for introducing many of the non-"Kindergarten" members of the Moot, and he organised most of the finance. His rôle in the early organisation was therefore pivotal. He also provided much of the intellectual inspiration behind the Round Table movement. The extent to which the Round Tablers later developed and even departed from Milner's ideas is, of course, one of the questions raised by the history of the movement.

Milner was a man of "very deep prejudices"<sup>1</sup>, whose opinions were largely fixed. At their heart was a "British Race - Patriotism" which

---

<sup>1</sup> Vincent Massey's impression after meeting Milner in 1912: Claude Bissell, *The Young Vincent Massey* (Toronto, 1981), p 95.

claimed "that this is the law of human progress, that the competition between nations, each seeking its maximum development, is the Divine Order of the world, the law of Life and Progress".<sup>1</sup>

Towards non-Europeans Milner's attitude was one of paternalism, a belief in "the inherent superiority of the European in certain qualities of brain and character". This allowed him to embrace the "Rhodesian" ideal of "equal rights for every civilised man", in the belief that few non-Europeans would ever attain the level of "civilisation" of Europeans.<sup>2</sup> Towards non-British Europeans, Milner's attitude was one of greater fear. He regarded international politics as a "racial" struggle, and imperial politics as a contest between the "English" or "British" on one hand, and the Irish, Québécois and Afrikaners on the other. As he wrote to Curtis in 1908, after a visit to Canada,

"I am more than ever impressed . . . by the fact that the only real and permanent tie of Empire is race . . . . [that] without a strong and enduring British leaven, a large mass of the population to whom British traditions, British history, and the British language are dear, it is impossible permanently to retain any great white community in political connection with the mother country".<sup>3</sup>

Like his friend and Oxford contemporary Sir George Parkin - the "bagman of Empire" for whose lecture-tours of the 1890s Milner arranged much of the finance - Milner saw the consolidation of the white Empire as a

- 
- 1 Milner, "The Key to My Position", printed in *The Times*, 27 July 1925 (often referred to as Milner's "Credo").
  - 2 Milner's last speech in South Africa, 13 Feb 1925, published in *Cape Times*, 14 May 1925 (cutting in Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002).
  - 3 Milner to Curtis, 1 Dec 1908, Curtis Papers 1, fol 231.

question of "National Union".<sup>1</sup>

It followed from Milner's national Darwinism that the nation, not the individual or class, was the fundamental "organic" social unit. He supported a limited programme of social reform, state intervention and "National Efficiency" on the grounds that "there can be no enduring Empire without healthy, thriving, manly people at the centre".<sup>2</sup> But he also believed that national power was a precondition of national prosperity, and that "this country must remain a great Power or she will become a poor country". Like Captain Mahan, another important influence on the Round Tablers, Milner likened national power to reserve cash in a bank, which, although rarely necessary to use, determined the effectiveness and even survival of a struggling business.<sup>3</sup>

Given his experience as an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate (in 1885), his belief in the existence and priority of a "national" view, and the contemporary political ineffectiveness of the "new" imperialism, it was perhaps inevitable that Milner should conceive what was at times a violent dislike towards the British political system. He viewed party politics as "a pure struggle of ins and outs without any inner meaning . . . whatever": a system which gave "ultimate power" to "ignorant people", who would

---

1 Milner, "Mr Chamberlain and Imperial Policy", in *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Associated Newspapers Ltd, London, 1914), p 205. The description of Parkin was Lord Rosebery's.

2 Milner, *Constructive Imperialism: Five Speeches* (London, 1908), p 69.

3 Milner's speech to the Manchester Conservative Club, 14 Dec 1906, *Imperial Unity: Two Speeches* (London, 1907), p 7; see also Milner's speech to the Canadian Club, Vancouver, 9 Oct 1908, *The Nation and the Empire* (London, 1913), p 307.

inevitably be unreceptive to "trained knowledge and complete information".<sup>1</sup> His conception was fundamentally bureaucratic. "Organisation was his watchword", and he thought that mismanagement "may do much more harm than murder".<sup>2</sup> In his view, "administration" was "government in the true sense of the word".<sup>3</sup> He believed in government by "experts", and perhaps only fellow-experts could recognise expertise. He held little faith in party politicians being able to do so.

Milner's dislike of the British political system was well formed even before his appointment as High Commissioner of South Africa in 1897. Nevertheless, his experience in that post gave a bitter personal twist to his views. The Unionists were lacking in that quintessential Milnerite quality, "thorough"; and they were divided by Joe Chamberlain's campaign for Tariff Reform. The Liberals, on the other hand, were revitalised by opposition to the war - for the outbreak and prolongation of which Milner was, perhaps rightly, held responsible<sup>4</sup> - and to Milner's subsequent use of "Chinese slavery". Milner resigned while the Unionists were still in power but his name remained anathema to Liberals.

1 Milner to Lady Edward Cecil, 16 May 1903, quoted in Cecil Headlam (ed), *The Milner Papers: South Africa, Vol II* (London, 1933), pp 446-9.

2 Rt Hon H A L Fisher, quoted in "At New College", *National Review*, Vol 107 (Nov 1936), p 611; Milner, *Bustle* (Froebel Institute, Oxford, 1897), p 5.

3 Milner to Sir Lewis Michell, 13 May 1904, Milner Papers 188, fols 53-54.

4 For a damning indictment, see Eric Stokes, "Milnerism", *Hist Journal*, Vol V (1962), pp 47-60.

Although he recognised that he was not cut out to be a "successful politician in the ordinary sense", Milner was determined to remain a force in politics: "to work quietly in the background, in the formation of opinion rather than in the exercise of power".<sup>2</sup> The extent to which he attempted to build up a caucus of his own is debatable. His main work lay in propagandising for the "new" imperialism, in laying the groundwork for future changes. Nevertheless, this work involved him in acting as an unofficial "fixer" for the imperialist movement.

Milner's personal generosity was legendary. After his death, his widow was to complain that the number of his dependents was "legion".<sup>3</sup> But the main source of funds for Milner's imperialist nexus was the Rhodes Trust, of which he was the most active Trustee.<sup>4</sup> Large amounts were found for the South African Association and Progressive Party, and for Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. Others who benefited included Halford Mackinder and Leo Amery.<sup>5</sup> Amery had been the *Times* war correspondent in South Africa, and was now editing the *Times History* of that war. He was also writing various articles in favour of national service and Tariff Reform.<sup>6</sup> Defeated as a

- 
- 1 Milner to Dawkins, 21 Apr 1904, quoted in Headlam, *op cit* Vol II, p 550.
  - 2 Milner's speech at Johannesburg, 31 Mar 1905, *The Nation and the Empire* (London, 1913), p 90.
  - 3 Lady Milner to Grigg, 8 June 1925, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002.
  - 4 Milner to Alfred Beit, 9 Sept 1914, Milner Papers 469, fols 138-9.
  - 5 Details of payments in Milner Papers, boxes 468-477.
  - 6 Reprinted as *The Problem of the Army* (London, 1903) and *The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade* (London, 1906).

Unionist candidate in 1906, Amery was funded by the Rhodes Trust to act as a one-man "imperial secretariat" for Milner, and to continue his work organising the Compatriots' Club.<sup>1</sup> The latter was a sort of Milner Appreciation Society started by Amery in January 1904, with branches in both England and South Africa. Its object was "to advance the ideal of a United British Empire". It petered out sometime around 1911, when Amery obtained the safe Unionist seat of Birmingham South.<sup>2</sup>

### The "Kindergarten"

The most significant group of Milner's protégés, who would form the backbone of the South African Compatriots and later of the Round Table, was his South African "Kindergarten". The origins of this group go back to 1900-01, when Milner, preparing for his rôle as Governor of the two defeated republics, began recruiting staff. Deluged by an "enormous number of applications"<sup>3</sup>, Milner fell back on the criteria of personal, family and college connections as the simplest way of building a cohesive, loyal team.

All graduates of Oxford, and all, save Duncan and Dawson, of New College, the "Kindergarten" shared a contempt for the outlandish Boers and

- 
- 1 Amery to Milner, 30 Mar 1908, Milner Papers 476, fols 6-8.
  - 2 A copy of the "Rules of the Compatriots Club", including membership lists for England and South Africa, is in Lothian Papers 4, item 279. The Club was revived as a parliamentary group in June 1923 with Amery as chairman; his diaries mention Compatriots' Club dinners as late as October 1947, but in its second incarnation the Club was apparently not an active pressure group. See Julian Barnes and David Nicholson (eds), *The Leo Amery Diaries* (London, 1980 and 1988) *passim*.
  - 3 W Baillie Hamilton (Colonial Office) to Lord Ralph Kerr, 21 June 1903, Lothian Papers 453, fol 2.

uneducated Britons in whose country they landed.<sup>1</sup> They stuck together, sharing houses, holidaying and sporting together, and organising "Oxford dinners". Above all, they were united by a common veneration for "H E", Lord Milner. John Buchan wrote that "loyalty to Milner and his creed was a strong cement which endured long after our South African service ended".<sup>2</sup> A L Rowse has suggested that "homo-eroticism" was an element in Milner's relationship with the "Kindergarten".<sup>3</sup> This can be neither proved nor disproved. What is certain is that service with Milner would be a useful "apprenticeship" in public affairs<sup>4</sup>; and that a large part of Milner's attraction was his "unflinching devotion" to the imperialist cause.<sup>5</sup>

After his retirement, Milner was pessimistic about the prospects for British interests in southern Africa: his friend and one-time amour Margot Asquith reported that "he has got it on the brain that we shall lose South Africa".<sup>6</sup> The "Kinde" shared some of Milner's pessimism and they

---

1 See, eg, Perry to W P Ker, 23 Oct 1900, printed in E C Hodgkin, "The Kindergarten", *The Times*, 13 July 1974.

2 John Buchan, *Memory Hold the Door* (London, 1940), p 99.

3 A L Rowse, "Lionel Curtis: the Prophet" in *Glimpses of the Great* (London, 1985), p 342.

4 R S Rait to Lord Ralph Kerr, 26 June 1903, Lothian Papers 453, fol 3.

5 Hichens, quoted in "At New College", *National Review*, Vol 107 (Nov 1936), p 608.

6 Margot Asquith, *Autobiography, Vol II* (London, 1922), p 85.

recognised that self-government "will give the Dutch a majority".<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the "Kindergarten" still expected a predominantly British South Africa. One means by which this was to be achieved was through British immigration, and the other members of the "Kindergarten" gave Dove much support in his work for the Land Settlement Board. At one point there was even a "Kindergarten" committee to supervise land settlement schemes. A handbook for suitably wealthy settlers was later run off as a preliminary issue of the *Round Table*.<sup>2</sup> The other means was the unification of South Africa. A disunited South Africa was an economically backward South Africa, rendering large-scale immigration impossible. As Selborne put the argument later, "there can be no expansion without stability; and there can be no stability without Federation. Q E D."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, with Lord Selborne's approval and encouragement, the "Kindergarten" set to work as a "deadly secret Ctee"<sup>4</sup> to promote the cause of federation. Milner was persuaded to arrange £1000 initial finance for the project, from the Rhodes Trust.<sup>5</sup> Curtis combined the knowledge and ideas of the group in a memorandum outlining the case for unification. This memorandum, after amendment and approval by Selborne and the

- 1 Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 28 Jan 1906, Lothian Papers 454, fol 7.
- 2 *The Round Table: Preliminary Issue*, 25 July 1910, copy in Rhodes House Library. The committee consisted of Dove, Wyndham, Duncan, Feetham, Perry and Dawson, but it appears to have been inactive: see the letter from the last four to Curtis, 23 Aug 1909, in Lothian Papers 11, fols 42-5.
- 3 Selborne to Duncan, 30 Nov 19.07, quoted in L M Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa, 1902-10* (Oxford, 1960), p 80.
- 4 Dawson's diary, 1 Sept 1906, Dawson Papers 12.
- 5 Milner to Robinson (Dawson), 21.9.06, Dawson Papers 61, fols 38-45.

"Kindergarten", was published in July 1907.<sup>1</sup>

The "Selborne Memorandum", as it became known, was a forceful document, calculated to stir white South Africans of both "races". An introductory chapter (which, as ex-President Steyn of the Orange Free State noted, was "full of . . . bad history"<sup>2</sup>) asserted the common "Teutonic" origins of both British and Afrikaners. The Memorandum went on to describe the deleterious effects of disunion, with particular emphasis on southern Africa's railway and fiscal development (for which Brand and Kerr provided much useful material), and on "Native and Labour Questions". Much was made of the need to provide overwhelming force for the "defence of civilisation" against the "uncivilised masses", and of the trouble caused by "5 or 6" different "native" and "Asiatic" policies. Finally, the Memorandum held out to white South Africans the possibility of expansion northwards - the development of "vast and vacant" lands, even as far as Lake Tanganyika, "in whatever degree this great region is a country where white men can work and thrive and multiply".<sup>3</sup>

The Memorandum had no great immediate effect. It was only with the downfall of Jameson in the Cape elections of January 1908 that Afrikaner politicians awoke to the possibilities inherent in pursuing the cause of

---

1 See Thompson, *op cit*, pp 67-70, for Curtis's intrigues with Jameson and F S Malan to get the memorandum published.

2 *Ibid*, p 77.

3 Basil Williams (ed), *The Selborne Memorandum* (Oxford, 1925): pp 109 and 112 ("defence of civilisation . . ."), 140 and 145 ("vast and vacant . . ."). The Memorandum was first published, with an appendix by Kerr on "South African Railway Unification", as Cd 3564, 1907.

Union. From then on events moved with astounding rapidity, with Botha, Smuts, Merriman and others arguing for full unification, not just federation.<sup>1</sup>

The "Kindergarten" expanded its work in a variety of directions. Curtis and Feetham, Selborne's nominees in the Transvaal upper house, maintained the pressure there. Dawson converted the *Star* and *The Times* to vehicles of propaganda for the movement, and Curtis wrote regular articles for the *Morning Post*. With funding from Abe Bailey and Lord Salisbury, Curtis set about organising "Closer Union Societies", of which there were more than sixty by March 1909. Kerr - who in May 1907 had turned down Selborne's offer of "Federation work", on the grounds that it might prejudice his chances of getting a good appointment with a colonial government<sup>2</sup> - was persuaded to edit a new monthly magazine, *The State*, devoted to the aim of unification and again funded by Bailey. In February 1909 a draft constitution was ready, and the "Kindergarten" threw its efforts into ensuring a safe passage through the four colonial legislatures (Southern Rhodesia having opted out by this stage). In Natal, by now the only British-dominated colony, these efforts were particularly crucial.

In later years, members of the "Kindergarten" received a great deal of credit as "the men who conceived and carried through the Union of South Africa".<sup>3</sup> At the time, Selborne congratulated Curtis in particular:

- 
- 1 The "Kindergarten" acquiesced in the rejection of federalism. Indeed, Curtis later claimed that his research had shown a unitary constitution to be preferable: Curtis to Kerr, 21 July 1910, Lothian Papers 1, fol 64.
  - 2 Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 20 May 1907, Lothian Papers 456, fol 25.
  - 3 "Frederick Scott Oliver", *The Times*, 5 June 1934; cf John Dove, "The Round Table: A Mystery Probed", 1924, Brand Papers, box 70.

"although you had many splendid helpers, the main credit for this work must always be yours".<sup>1</sup> In Leonard Thompson's view, this was clearly a case of confusion between the midwife and the mother. Nevertheless, the "Kindergarten's" rôle in South Africa became a fundamental element in the Round Table's mystique, important both in projecting the group as a significant and effective political force, and in providing it with a model for future action.

### The Imperial Problem

By the time of the foundation of the Round Table, the prospects for Imperial integration seemed, in many ways, bleak. Chamberlain's campaign for imperial preference had already run into the sands of domestic opposition; and the various schemes for improved consultation and co-operation associated with Sir Frederick Pollock's informal "committee" had likewise failed to make significant headway.<sup>2</sup> The Colonial Conference of 1907 resulted in changes which were more symbolic than substantial, the British Government this time leading the sceptics.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the relations

1 Selborne to Curtis, 6 Feb 1909, RT Papers c 876, fol 62.

2 On the "Pollock Committee", see M G Miller, 'The Continued Agitation for Imperial Union, 1895-1910' (D Phil thesis, Oxford, 1981) chs 1 and 2; J E Kendle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences* (London, 1967), ch 4.

3 Kendle, *op cit.*, ch 5.

between Britain and the Dominions (as they were now called) seemed to be increasingly intractable as a result of a growing awareness of distinct and even divergent interests and priorities.<sup>1</sup>

"Colonial Nationalism" was the subject of a seminal work by Richard Jebb, published in 1905, in which the distinctness of colonial identities was forcefully asserted.<sup>2</sup> Historians John Eddy, Deryck Schreuder and others have demonstrated the extent to which Jebb "exposed an immutable rock of emerging social reality", which was bound to make all subsequent centralising efforts a "grand ballet of incomprehension".<sup>3</sup> Such an eventuality was by no means clear at the time, however.

In an essay published in the same year as his *Studies*, Jebb denied that there was any necessary opposition either between colonial nationalism and imperial unity, or between co-operation and federation.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, it was possible to read Jebb's *Studies* as proof of the "new imperialist" thesis that the colonies of settlement, having achieved autonomy in their

1 Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment* (Penguin edn, London, 1974), pp 22-29; Paul Hayes, "British Foreign Policy and the Influence of Empire, 1870-1920" in R F Holland and G Rizvi (eds) *Perspectives on Imperialism and Decolonization* (London, 1984), pp 105-113.

2 Jebb, *Studies in Colonial Nationalism* (London, 1905).

3 J J Eddy and D M Schreuder (eds), *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism* (London and Sydney, 1988), pp 88, 51; cf J D B Miller, *Richard Jebb and the Problem of Empire* (London, 1956) and *The Commonwealth in the World* (London, 1958), pp 29-32.

4 Jebb, "Imperial Organization", pp 332-50 of C S Goldman (ed), *The Empire and the Century* (London, 1905).

domestic affairs, were now ripe for some share of the responsibilities and burdens of Imperial affairs. This appears to have been the "Kindergarten's" reading of Jebb's book: Kerr for one thought it "extraordinarily good" and Jebb "absolutely right in his general thesis".<sup>1</sup>

The ultimate failure of proposals for Imperial federation is apt to lend their promoters an air of naïveté, even irrelevance. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the "ambivalent" and "transitional" nature of colonial nationalism, which Eddy and Schreuder have themselves emphasised.<sup>2</sup> It was transitional from a state of colonial dependence, not of "organic" unity. Therefore, as Kerr asserted, its

"vigour, self-confidence, even its somewhat aggressive independence, is immeasurably more valuable to the Empire than the apathetic irresponsibility of the 'colonial days'".<sup>3</sup>

What colonial nationalism was "transitional" to was, of course, a "moot" point.

People in the Dominions themselves rarely envisaged a future outside the Empire. Curtis found the Colbertian view - that colonies were like fruit which, when ripe, would drop from the imperial tree - to be prevalent amongst British politicians. But he contrasted this with the situation in the Dominions.<sup>4</sup> Historians have tended to confirm this aspect of

1 Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 1 Apr 1906, Lothian Papers 454, fol 16; cf Curtis to Jebb, 31 Dec 1906, Jebb Papers. Jebb's book was quoted in the *Selborne Memorandum*: B Williams, op cit, pp 90-92. For the later argument between Jebb and the Round Table, see below, pp 96 and 130-31.

2 Eddy and Schreuder, op cit, p 53 and passim.

3 [Kerr,] "The Conference and the Empire", *RT*, Nov 1911, p 412.

4 Curtis to Sir Courtney Ilbert, 2 Sept 1916, RT Papers c 798, fols 251-53.

Curtis's judgment. Sir Keith Sinclair and Carl Berger have illustrated the extent to which, in New Zealand and Canada, the growth of local nationalism was bound up with a continuance of imperial loyalty. Both have argued that, in Sinclair's words, local imperialism "was itself an expression of an emergent . . . nationalism".<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly this was the case; but, for it to be so, there must have been a strong presumption that the Empire provided opportunities for national growth and the pursuit of national interests.

Imperial loyalty was, of course, often expressed in terms of ethnic identity. Milner saw "race" as the glue which would hold Britain and the Dominions together. This view was also expressed by members of the "Kindergarten", such as Brand and Malcolm. On the whole, however, the "Kindergarten" was far more ambivalent than Milner on the question of race. The imperialism of Curtis and Kerr, in particular, was primarily cultural rather than racial. This did not mean that it was any the less fervent. Kerr asserted in 1920 "that the future of the world depends upon the gradual recognition by the rest of the world of the fundamental principles which lie at the heart of Anglo-Saxon civilisation".<sup>2</sup> What is important is that Kerr saw "Anglo-Saxon" values as exportable and universal. While he could agree with Milner, therefore, that pan-Britannic nationalism would assist Imperial unity, he was not convinced that the converse was true, that the existence of other "races" would work in favour of disintegration.

The "Kindergarten's" experience in South Africa was in this respect important. Initially, Milner's young men saw British-Afrikaner relations

---

1 Sinclair, *Imperial Federation* (London, 1955), p 47; Berger, *A Sense of Power* (Toronto, 1970).

2 Kerr to Curtis, 9 June 1920, Lothian Papers 208, fols 255-58.

in "racial" terms, like Milner himself. But the alliance which they developed with Botha, Smuts and others induced a more optimistic assessment of the balance of forces in South Africa than was the case with Milner. This optimism extended also to Québécois nationalists such as Bourassa. "I don't believe that he would be opposed to the Imperialism of people like Curtis and myself", Kerr wrote of Bourassa in 1910.<sup>1</sup>

Probably the most fundamental reason for the "Kindergarten's" sanguine assessment of colonial nationalism was a belief in what was often referred to as "the pressure of facts". Like most Edwardian imperialists, the "Kindergarten" saw international relations in terms of a constant, uncompromising struggle for national existence. In a hostile, insecure and Hobbesian world, the individual Dominions would find themselves "classed with Chile and Peru". Per contra, by remaining within the Empire but contributing towards its costs in return for a share in its direction, the Dominions would have the power to secure fully their own interests and integrity.<sup>2</sup>

#### "Curtis's Scheme"

The idea of a new organisation to campaign for Imperial union was first mooted in 1907. By March 1909 the "Kindergarten" had evolved a definite scheme, which Curtis elaborated in a letter to Amery. In its essentials, it was clearly and consciously modelled on the "Kindergarten's" previous activities. A memorandum was to be drafted, then thrashed into an acceptable form by a small "editorial committee". Curtis was again to act

---

1 Kerr to E J Kylie, 16 Dec 1910 (Kylie file), RT (O) Papers.

2 [Kerr,] "The Question of Policy", [1910,] Lothian Papers 14, fol 275.

as draughtsman, travelling round the Dominions "as a sort of prospector". Simultaneously, a chain of publications would be set up, with a London office under Kerr "to feed them with pictures and stuff". Finally, a wider circle would be organised in each of the Dominions, to "master the information placed at their disposal" and orchestrate propaganda for the adoption of the necessary reforms.<sup>1</sup>

Curtis and other members of the "Kindergarten" (Brand, Craik, Dawson, Kerr and Marris) spent the summer of 1909 in England drumming up support for their project, which Milner generally referred to as "Curtis's scheme". Others involved included Amery, Jameson (who was temporarily in Britain), Milner's secretary Arthur Steel-Maitland, Robert Martin Holland (later Holland-Martin), a banker and friend of Dove, and F S Oliver, author of a biography of Alexander Hamilton, which, Milner wrote, "put me and many others under a permanent obligation to you".<sup>2</sup>

The meetings between Milner, the "Kinde" and their new contacts do not appear to have been minuted, but their conclusions were summarised in a printed document. This stated that Britain was suffering under an increasingly heavy burden of defence expenditure. The Dominions were not sharing it, even though they were beginning to influence the conduct of British foreign policy. The situation would eventually break down. The

---

1 Curtis to Amery, 29 Mar 1909, quoted in Walter Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men* (London, 1968), pp 134-6.

2 Milner to Oliver, 5 Nov 1907, Oliver Papers 86, fol 2; Curtis quoted from Oliver's book in the "Selborne Memorandum": B Williams, *op cit*, pp 87-8.

scheme outlined by Curtis to Amery was therefore approved: the creation in each Dominion of "a small group of carefully selected men"; a "central group" in London, "to collect, to digest, and to disseminate information"; "special organs" in each Dominion, along the lines of *The State*; and an itinerant agent to co-ordinate the campaign.

"[A]ll these activities would have for their primary object the preparation by the central agency in communication with the rest of a full and reasoned statement of the Imperial problem, setting out the alternatives involved, the real import of disruption, the sacrifices necessary to avoid it, and the successive stages through which the ultimate goal is to be sought . . . . so compiled that each of the groups will be prepared to adopt and to issue it as its own manifesto."

The movement should be "tacit" until a common policy was agreed. "[F]or the present it would be inexpedient to seek or to allow identification with any party." An expenditure of £25,000 was to be anticipated, excluding the cost of producing magazines.<sup>1</sup>

The first Round Table meeting, described as such, took place at Plas Newydd in North Wales over the weekend of 4 - 5 September 1909. The party included four men, all peers, who were new to discussions of the project. They were Lords Anglesey, the host and one of Milner's "diehard" allies; Lovat, another ally and a prominent conscriptionist; Howick, heir to Earl Grey; and Wolmer, Selborne's heir. The printed conclusions arrived at earlier in the summer were rubber-stamped, and it was agreed to employ Curtis and Kerr at £1000 pa each, and to send them and Marris on a fact-finding tour of Canada straightaway. Significantly, however, the meeting

---

1 [Marris,] "Memorandum of Conversations which took place between a few English and South African friends at intervals during the summer of 1909", Curtis Papers 156, item 1.

placed more emphasis on the need of formulating "subsidiary objects", and it was agreed that "for the present, and until the situation was ripe for some constitutional measure every effort should be made to extend the principle of co-operation".

Curtis, Kerr and Marris set sail for Canada on 17 September 1909. Before they did so, Amery had passed on a letter from Keith Feiling, an All Souls colleague now teaching at Toronto, in which a degree of circumspection was commended. "The average Canadian thinks of Canada first, the old country next, and the Empire third", Feiling wrote; "new" imperialism was virtually non-existent, and consequently "the dangers of any step leading to organic union are very great".<sup>2</sup> Kerr's notes show that the emissaries found attitudes towards the Empire which could not have been more striking as proof of Feiling's warnings. Not only the likes of Bourassa or Dafoe, but even G M Wrong, E J Kylie and A J Glazebrook thought Imperial Union for the moment impracticable: imperial federation was "a long way off", the "present system works all right", the Empire "must become looser before it really cohered", federalism was "academic", "any statement of [the] problem as a whole would have [a] bad effect".<sup>3</sup>

Curtis's experience merely confirmed his beliefs. Reporting back for his colleagues, Curtis catalogued the dismal failure of Canadians to understand the "new imperialism": their inadequate perception of international rivalries, their lack of "proper recognition of native problems", their ignorance of the way Imperial Union could extend

---

1 Minutes of RT Meeting, Plas Newydd, 4-6 Sept 1909, Lothian Papers 11, fols 1-6.

2 Feiling to Amery, 25 June 1909, Lothian Papers 11, fols 24-26.

3 [Notes from tour of Canada,] Lothian Papers 5, fols 1-104.

Canada's voice. Curtis urged haste: with the lapse of time, the difficulties of bringing Canada into closer union "will increase".<sup>1</sup>

Kerr's experience had the opposite effect: as he wrote to his father, it led him "to modify some of my views about the Empire" and to doubt the viability of the "Plas Newydd plans".<sup>2</sup> In his report, Kerr also stressed the paucity of "new imperialism" and the obstacles in its way. But he emphasised that "the tide of opinion" flowed in favour of Empire and that Canadians "will probably put their necks many an inch further into the noose of Imperialism without realising it". There was a real danger that premature action would make Canadians "frightened".<sup>3</sup> Kerr argued against the publication of any memorandum. At most, there might be a need for a "statement of broad ends and policy"; but the primary aim was rather one of "establishing loosely correlated centres of constructive imperialism, each pursuing a course suited to the peculiar needs of its own Dominion".<sup>4</sup>

Kerr's disagreement with Curtis was not over the eventual need for imperial federation, nor yet over its form; rather, it was over the question of timing. Whereas Curtis was all for immediate action and forcing the issue, Kerr believed that "we have lots of time in front of

- 
- 1 [Curtis,] "Confidential" [Memorandum on Canada, 1910], Lothian Papers 11, fols 59-78.
  - 2 Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 1 Nov 1909, Lothian Papers 459, fol 9.
  - 3 [Kerr,] "The Situation in Canada", [1910,] Lothian Papers 14, fols 351-74.
  - 4 [Kerr,] "The Question of Policy", [1910,] Lothian Papers 14, fols 272-88.

us". As he wrote to his uncle at the end of 1910, he expected a choice to be made "in the next half century or less"; but "I don't believe that anything we in England can do in the next year or so will do much benefit".<sup>2</sup>

A meeting of the available members of the "Kindergarten" in January 1910 upheld Curtis's view on the importance of the memorandum. It was also, for the first time, specific about the aim of the movement: "an Imperial government constitutionally responsible to all the electors of the Empire", with control of defence, foreign policy and the dependencies. However, the Moot placed greater emphasis than before on "the encouragement of intermediate steps" and "the education of public opinion". Moreover, Curtis's idea of a network of journals was dropped, in favour of a single magazine to be edited in London.<sup>3</sup> A meeting a week later, at which the "Kindergarten" members were joined by Milner, Oliver, Lovat and Amery, signified a further retreat from Curtis's original plans. The previous meeting's definition of the principles of organic union was approved, but "it was also agreed . . . that nobody was committed to the acceptance of all of them".<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Kerr to Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, Lothian Papers 2, fol 91.

2 Kerr to Duke of Norfolk, 22 Dec 1910, Lothian Papers 2, fols 157-64.

3 Minutes of RT meeting, Ledbury, 15-18 Jan 1910, Lothian Papers 11, fols 7-11.

4 Minutes of RT meeting, London, 23 Jan 1910, Lothian Papers 11, fols 12-13.

### Aims and Means

"Closer union" was a vague term, used at the time to describe any proposal which aimed at increasing the internal cohesion of the Empire, whether in the field of education, culture, economics or politics, and, if in the latter, whether supra-parliamentary, extra-parliamentary or inter-governmental. For the "Kindergarten", however, with their South African experience, "closer union of the Empire" had a more specific meaning: the creation of a new body, with powers over the whole Empire, a real Imperial Parliament, and with it "a single defence force animated by a single defence policy and controlled by a single executive".<sup>1</sup>

The reasons why the Round Tablers sought a constitutional reconstruction of the Empire are perhaps obvious. First and foremost was what might be called the Seeley thesis: in Selborne's words, the belief "that, if this country is to maintain herself in the years to come in the same rank with the US, Russia and Germany, the unit must be enlarged from the UK to the Empire".<sup>2</sup> A second reason was to strengthen the resources at the command of British rule in India and the dependencies. These were, as Curtis put it, "volcanoes upon which Great Britain is obliged to sit".<sup>3</sup> Finally, a number of the Moot (Milner and Oliver in particular) saw in Imperial union the means to insulate the Empire's against the violent swings which they associated with Britain's party politics. Kerr

- 
- 1 [Craik and Hichens,] "Draft letter to Steel-Maitland", [June 1912,] RT Papers, c 777 fols 85-8.
- 2 Selborne to E Prettyman, 19 Sept 1903, Selborne Papers 73, fols 5-6.
- 3 [Curtis,] *Memoranda on Canada and the British Commonwealth* (privately printed, Letchworth, 1910), p 26.

apparently shared this view, writing in 1910 that "a body whose business is to control foreign relations, the army and navy, and frame a policy for the Dependencies, must not be liable to be overborne by gusts of popular opinion".<sup>1</sup>

The Round Table differed from other imperialist pressure groups such as the Primrose League and the Overseas Club, and from the ill-fated Imperial Federation League, in thus having a reasonably clear idea of the aims it existed to pursue. It also differed in having, in the strategy outlined by Curtis, a fairly coherent idea of the means by which to achieve those aims.

Curtis's strategy was not without its critics in the early Moot. For Kerr, the main need was to disseminate the Imperialists' "belief in a common Anglo-Saxon civilisation and its influence on the world", and this, as he now realised, would take time, perhaps half a century.<sup>2</sup> Although Curtis never came round to such a long-term perspective, by 1913 he agreed that it would take "5 - 15 years of steady unsensational work" before the conditions were ripe for federation.<sup>3</sup>

The meetings which followed Curtis's and Kerr's visit to Canada brought nearer the surface other divergences and difficulties. It was not found possible to reach a formula for the proposed federation with which all members of the Moot could agree. "Federation", like "closer union",

- 1 [Kerr,] "The Constitution of the Empire" [1910], Lothian Papers 14, fol 327.
- 2 [Kerr,] "The Question of Policy", [1910,] Lothian Papers 14, fols 279-88.
- 3 Curtis to Grigg, 17 Oct 1913, RT Papers c 807, fol 36.

was a vague term, and in some respects it was best kept that way. There were also problems defining the group's attitude to co-operation. As Amery wrote to Jebb in 1912, he for one was "convinced . . . that you cannot carry out federalism merely by letting the existing system break down"; federalism could only come about once there was "a practical federal spirit in the air, in other words men who have been accustomed to co-operate on quasi-federal lines".<sup>1</sup> Milner, Selborne, Brand and Kerr all expressed similar reservations before 1914.

Another bone of contention was Curtis's insistence that the Round Table should concentrate on moulding opinion in the Dominions rather than Britain. In a joint letter, Dawson, Duncan, Feetham and Perry argued that "for the present at any rate there is more need in London for vigorous organization and propaganda on the lines you indicate than in the colonies".<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Amery thought that

"the real difficulty when it comes to the pinch is not going to be the Dominions but this country, and this country has got to be familiarised with the idea that it must surrender its monopoly of power".<sup>3</sup>

Again, Curtis was initially resistant, as was Kerr, on the grounds that it was the Dominions who would be asked to make financial sacrifices.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1913-14 the Moot had effectively agreed the necessity for domestic propaganda. The *Round Table* magazine was given out free in much

1 Minutes of Moots, 15-18 Jan 1910 and 23 Jan 1910, Lothian Papers 11, fols 7-11 and 12-13; Amery to Jebb, 21 May 1912, Jebb Papers.

2 Duncan et al to Curtis, 23 Aug 1909, Lothian Papers 11, fols 42-45.

3 Amery to Kerr, 26 Jan 1911 (Amery file), RT (O) Papers.

4 Kerr to Amery, 27 Jan 1911, *ibid.*

larger quantities in Britain than in the Dominions; and a small start was made on "mass" opinion via the Workers' Educational Association.

Curtis's original plan was thus criticised in a number of respects by his colleagues, and in some was substantially modified. Moreover, the Moot reserved its opinion on a number of important issues. Nevertheless, in essentials, it was Curtis's scheme which was adopted in the course of the founding meetings of 1909-10.

Wimocks and Kendle have both emphasised the extent to which the Round Table was committed to an element of deception, by which on the one hand it portrayed itself as a disinterested network of "study-groups", and on the other it prepared the framework for an eventual federationist movement. There is some truth in this criticism. A degree of disingenuousness was thought necessary to allow "the gradual formation of right opinion".<sup>1</sup> The need for secretiveness was constantly reiterated and Hichens for one recorded his embarrassment when asked "'Do tell me what is Mr Curtis doing'" over the next few years.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Round Table's reticence also reflected the extent to which it was divided. As Oliver emphasised, the Moot was in no position to offer "pontifical recommendations" until it was itself agreed on the necessary reforms.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Minutes of RT meeting, 18 July 1912, RT Papers c 777, fols 133-4.

2 Hichens, "Provisional Proposals for the Organisation of the RT Office", May 1913, RT Papers c 778, fols 119-21; cf eg Minutes of RT Meeting, London, 4 Apr 1911, RT Papers c 776, fol 146; Kerr, "Memorandum", 24 Jan 1911, *ibid*, fols 38-41.

3 Oliver to G M Paterson, 21 June 1912, RT Papers c 777, fols 92-95.

The London group was dominated from the start by Unionists.

Nevertheless, the Round Table repeatedly professed itself to be a non-party, or even an all-party, grouping.<sup>1</sup> Again the discrepancy is glaring, but not entirely dishonest. In part the Moot's stance was an attempt to avoid the fate of the "tariff reform" campaign and to keep the door open to an all-party federationist movement<sup>2</sup>; in part, also, it was an expression of intent. The Moot did try to recruit Liberal members, although without much success.<sup>3</sup> But the largest element in the Round Table's stance appears to have been a hearty contempt for the rôle of parties and party politicians. Like Milner, Kerr condemned "the palaeological rigidity of party creeds". The ordinary run of politicians, whether Liberal or Unionist, were no more than "interpreters": "they never make a move until they are pretty certain that public opinion in the country, or at least in their party, is ripe for it".<sup>4</sup>

Some effort was made to interest leading politicians in the Moot's work, sometimes with surprising results. Maud Selborne organised a dinner for Sir Edward Grey, after which she was "most amused to find that [Grey] considers the proposal for an Imperial Parliament to be a new and original

- 
- 1 Eg [Kerr,] "Introductory", *RT*, Nov 1910, p 2; Curtis, *The Round Table Movement* (1913), p 23.
  - 2 [Marris,] "Memorandum of Conversations . . . during the Summer of 1909", Curtis Papers 156, item 1, p 7.
  - 3 Harold Baker (MP for Accrington) was invited to join, but attended only one meeting. The Moot considered various other "suitable Liberal recruits", but was not keen to attract Liberals merely as "window dressing": Grigg to Curtis, 1 Nov 1913, *RT Papers* c 807, fols 70-74.
  - 4 Kerr to Curtis, 10 Aug 1910, *Lothian Papers* 2, fols 84-91.

speculation of his own".<sup>1</sup> After another dinner for Winston Churchill, Lady Selborne thought that he "means to steal the Moot's clothes while they are bathing, and come out as the one true original Imperialist".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in the Round Table view, party politics were secondary to the real political process. This was emphasised by Curtis, for instance, when he proposed to write to Austen Chamberlain in 1915: the latter, he believed, could be of great service, but as an influential voice in the business community, rather than as a politician.<sup>3</sup> Even Dominion politicians found themselves "a little out of it" when it came to their place in the Round Table scheme.<sup>4</sup>

The key to the Round Table strategy was "public opinion", of which the Round Tablers (like most who appealed to this court) had a rather limited view. "Personally I should say that the danger point in any great question depending on a popular decision is generally passed when one per cent of the voters have grasped the whole issues at stake", declared Curtis.<sup>5</sup> Obviously it depended very much on whom that "one per cent" comprised. Curtis and his associates were necessarily concerned that their movement should be composed of "persons of light and leading",<sup>6</sup> "the men of most weight and influence in each of the self-governing parts of the

---

1 Lady Selborne to Curtis, 14 Jan [1913], Curtis Papers 2, fols 129-30.

2 Lady Selborne to Curtis, Sept [1913], Curtis Papers 2, fols 158-59.

3 Curtis to Grigg, 24 Apr 1915, RT Papers c 809, fols 25-26.

4 Ernest H Scott to Kerr, 28 Nov 1916, conveying Sir Joseph Ward's complaint, RT Papers c 850, fol 81.

5 Curtis, *Notes on the Progress of the Movement in Australia* (Bombay, 1916), p 5.

6 "Round Table Statement", 1913, Round Table Papers c 778, fol 197.

Empire" - businessmen, lawyers and academics who could claim to speak with some authority, and journalists who were in a position to mould, as well as to reflect, "opinion".

The Round Tablers' strategy was patently élitist, as Nimocks and Kendle have emphasised. On the other hand, the Round Table's "target" audience was not a handful of well-placed politicians (as has been generally assumed), but the "opinion-makers" who could force politicians to act. Even so, it is tempting to see the Round Tablers' limited conception of this audience as one reason for the movement's failure. Nevertheless, their conception appears to have been neither unusual nor clearly wrong. Gladstone's idea of an "upper ten thousand" still carried weight, even in an age of mass democracy. Indeed, one of the few scholarly attempts to come to grips with foreign policy making in modern Britain has concluded that the "informed public" - which "not only exerts a direct influence upon the government" but "largely conduct[s] the public debate" - consists at most of "a few hundred active participants".<sup>2</sup>

#### The "Original Moot"

The metropolitan Round Table was always small and (until the 1980s) exclusively male.<sup>3</sup> Membership was conferred by invitation, and no attempt

- 
- 1 Kerr to G Craig-Sellar, [July 1910,] Round Table Papers c 776, fols 22-4.
  - 2 W Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* (London, 1976), pp 88, 100.
  - 3 Maud Selborne and later Nancy Astor were invaluable as hostesses and links with other political figures, but neither was counted a member of the Moot. There were proposals for a separate "Ladies' Moot" in 1911, but no apparent action. In 1945 Macadam suggested (unsuccessfully) that his wife Caroline and Margaret Hodson should be invited to join.

was made to publicise the group's composition.

Not all of those who attended the 1909 meetings remained active. Anglesey and Jameson played no part in subsequent Round Table activities, and Wolmer and Howick were dropped discreetly by the end of 1911. Lovat's interest appears to have waned. Martin-Holland was active only in the finance committee. Steel-Maitland dropped out after his election to the Chairmanship of the Conservative Party in 1911; his application to rejoin the Moot was initially rejected<sup>1</sup>, although he again attended a number of Moots between 1915 and 1921.

Lord Milner was the fulcrum upon which the 1909 meetings had turned. He maintained an active interest in the group throughout its early years, and occupied a position of particular authority on contentious issues. He was a sort of "father-figure" to the younger Round Tablers and "the leader to whom, above everyone else, they looked".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Round Table was only one of a number of projects in which Milner had an interest. As Brand later recalled, "Milner was always in our confidence but . . . he left all the active work to [the younger Round Tablers] . . . and particularly to Curtis".<sup>3</sup>

Lord and Lady Selborne corresponded frequently with members of the Kindergarten, and showed great interest in their well-being and advancement. The Moot often benefited from Selborne's "horse-sense" at meetings, but Selborne's position as an active Unionist grandee again

1 Minutes of RT meeting, 20 Feb 1913, RT (O) Papers.

2 [Brand,] Lord Milner, *RT*, June 1925, p 427.

3 Brand to C Quigley, 18 Nov 1961, RT Papers c 867, fols 113-15.

precluded an especially vigorous rôle in the Round Table movement. He appears not to have commanded the same respect as Milner. Malcolm later recalled that Selborne was "rather given to the kind of pious platitude which appeals more to the mob than to a coterie of intellectual young men".<sup>1</sup>

More directly involved in the day-to-day affairs of the Moot was F S Oliver, a hard-nosed Scotsman whose success in business had given him the financial security to delve pungently into the politics of his age. As "Pacificus", Oliver was the author of a series of *Times* articles advocating a federal solution to the Irish problem. A fervent supporter of Tariff Reform and National Service, Oliver, like Milner, claimed to be above party politics; nevertheless, the younger Round Tablers were quick to discover that "he is really a thoroughly party man".<sup>2</sup>

Leo Amery might likewise have been described as "thoroughly party", ambitiously and pugnaciously so. Convinced of his own "high political genius",<sup>3</sup> Amery was temperamentally averse to compromise, a characteristic which endeared him neither to the Unionist hierarchy nor to his fellow Round Tablers. Nevertheless, Amery was a leading figure in British

- 
- 1 Malcolm, "Philip Kerr", [1946], (Lothian file,) RT (O) Papers. For Selborne's political activities in these years, see George Boyce (ed), *The Crisis of British Unionism: The Domestic Political Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1885-1922* (London, 1987).
  - 2 Brand to Kerr, 23 July 1912, Brand Papers, box 182.
  - 3 Oliver to Dawson 7 Nov 1931, Oliver Papers 85, fols 243-4. By then Oliver himself was convinced that Amery was "nothing but a highly intellectual chatterbox, of bad judgement and quite extraordinarily unimpressive to common men".

Conservatism for almost half a century, and was a useful contact for other Round Tablers even after he had left the Moot.

Curtis and Kerr, the two original employees of the Round Table, were the Castor and Pollux of the movement, its spokesmen, ideologues and evangelisers. The relationship between the two was always close and mutually enriching - as Curtis declared, "I am only one blade in the scissors, and cut nothing unless I am hinged with you"<sup>1</sup> - but it was often also uncomfortable. Curtis tended to patronise the younger Kerr; Kerr for his part thought that Curtis had "a complex".<sup>2</sup>

Kerr was not the only person to see in Curtis some such defect. Arnold Toynbee characterised Curtis as a "monomaniac", absolutely convinced by his own sense of mission, and incapable of seeing either the wider context or the possibility that he might be wrong.<sup>3</sup> More charitably, Austen Chamberlain observed that Curtis was filled "with a delightful dogmatism and perhaps sometimes has not seen as far into a problem as he thinks".<sup>4</sup> The "Kindergarten" nicknamed Curtis "the prophet", a soubriquet he found most congenial.

Curtis's self-assurance was all the more remarkable in that - unlike most of his colleagues - he had been an academic failure. In conversation deceptively self-effacing, Curtis was austere, abrasive and almost entirely devoid of humour. Even his most fervent admirers were forced to admit that

1 Curtis to Kerr, 23 May 1927, Lothian Papers 227, fols 132-4.

2 Kerr to Lady Anne Kerr, 16 Sept 1914, Lothian Papers 464, fol 43.

3 Arnold J Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (Oxford, 1967), pp 130 ff.

4 Austen Chamberlain to Kerr, 24 Apr 1917, Lothian Papers 34, fol 13.

he was a "lover of mankind, not individual men".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, especially in the early years, Curtis exercised a remarkable hold over his Round Table colleagues, and also over a wider circle. Lord Salter later recalled that "neither I nor others . . . often succeeded" in "resisting what Lionel Curtis wished [us] to do".<sup>2</sup> Harry Hodson has described his tactics.

"First, the object - I almost wrote "victim" - was flattered with the insistence that he was uniquely able and fitted for the task; the whole enterprise, if not the future of the civilized world, turned upon him. Then the hypothetical consent became the assumed actual . . . . Finally the required conduct would be indicated with as much assurance that it would be followed as a doctor assumes when he writes a prescription."<sup>3</sup>

A larger than life character, Curtis had enormous energy, willpower and persistence. He tended to see everything and everyone in black and white. Similarly, other people tended to react violently either for or against him and his message. His personality was thus both an immense asset and an undoubted liability for the Round Table movement.<sup>4</sup>

Kerr's was a very different personality. By all accounts handsome, charming, even debonair, he was also intellectually gifted and capable of grasping subtleties and complexities which eluded Curtis. He had none of the latter's abrasiveness, although he did share Curtis's tendency to appear excessively self-assured. According to Thomas Jones, he

---

1 G M Gathorne-Hardy, *Lionel Curtis, CH, 1872-1955* (London, 1955), p 5.

2 Salter, *Memoirs of a Public Servant* (London, 1961), p 239.

3 Hodson, "Foreword" to Curtis, *World War: Its Cause and Cure* (London, 1992 edn), p v.

4 A rather hagiographic life of Curtis was written for a Harvard honors thesis by his godson J W Shepardson in 1949; a fuller and more balanced account is looked forward to from Deborah Lavin.

conveyed "a fallacious lucidity of one who had done the thinking and solved the difficulties for you".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the feature of Kerr's character which struck most friends and observers was a fundamental weakness for caprice and malleability. As Hodson recalled, he was "very impressionable".<sup>2</sup>

Kerr originally envisaged a political career after his return from South Africa.<sup>3</sup> In this he was encouraged by Oliver, who thought that in Parliament "you would be even more useful to our movement".<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, when a safe Unionist seat was offered him in April 1910, Kerr was persuaded by Curtis and others to turn it down in favour of the *Round Table* editorship.<sup>5</sup> Kerr saw the first four issues of the magazine off the press before embarking, in October 1911, on a year-long world tour. By the end of this he was suffering from profound physical and nervous exhaustion, which took the best part of the next two years to recover from. Although Kerr's attendance at pre-war meetings was therefore erratic, his was an

- 1 Thomas Jones, *A Diary With Letters, 1931-50* (Oxford, 1954), pp 514-15. Sir Robert Vansittart described Kerr/Lothian as "an incurably superficial Johnny-know-all": W N Medlicott, *Britain and Germany: the Search for Agreement, 1930-37* (London, 1969), p 12.
- 2 Hodson to Nevill Butler, 27 Nov 1947 (Lothian file), RT (O) Papers. Cf (Brand,) "Philip Kerr: Some Personal Memories", *RT*, June 1960, pp 234-43.
- 3 See, eg, Kerr to Lord Ralph Kerr, 4 Apr 1909, asking him to see Balfour "and remind him of Uncle Schomberg [the 10th Marquess of Lothian], and the family connections": Lothian Papers 458, fol 18.
- 4 Oliver to Kerr, 16 Aug 1909, Lothian Papers 11, fols 38-40.
- 5 Lord Ralph Kerr to Kerr, 7 and 10 April 1910, Lothian Papers 460, fols 1-4. Kerr's attempts to have the offer of the seat passed on to Craik were unsuccessful.

important influence in shaping the Round Table, and his openness to new ideas profoundly affected the subsequent direction of the movement.<sup>1</sup>

The careers of the other ex-members of the "Kindergarten" confirmed R S Rait's view that service with Milner in South Africa would prove a useful "apprenticeship" in public affairs.

As Chairman of Cammell Laird from August 1910 (appointed on Selborne's recommendation) Lionel Hitchens presided over one of Britain's major shipbuilding, steel and armaments conglomerates, and was an important figure in the contemporary debate on industrial relations, until his death in 1940. He served on numerous government committees and Royal Commissions between the wars. His rôle in the Moot was likened to "a steel rod of exquisite temper, revolving firmly and quietly, as an axle fulfilling its purpose should".<sup>2</sup> A close friend of Curtis's, Hitchens was often called upon to mediate between "the prophet" and the rest of the Moot.

Robert Brand joined Lazard Bros in 1909; he was its managing director until 1944, and a director until 1960. A key figure in the City of London, Brand also served on numerous government committees and was a frequent delegate at international conferences. Brand possessed a keen analytical mind. He was a "practical" man, and an enemy of "all sorts of metaphysics, bad or good".<sup>3</sup> He was undoubtedly Curtis's most persistent and effective

---

1 J R M Butler's biography of *Lord Lothian* (London, 1960) has yet to be superseded, but the collection of essays edited by John Turner, *The Larger Idea* (London, 1988), provides useful amplification.

2 [Coupland,] "Lionel Hitchens", *RT*, Dec 1940, p 14.

3 John Buchan, "Ordeal by Marriage" (13 page poem, privately printed, 1915), *Lothian Papers* 16, fols 483-91.

critic within the Moot, and relations between them were sometimes strained.

On Milner's recommendation, Dougal Malcolm was appointed a director of the British South Africa Co in 1912. (He became President of the Company in 1937). According to Lord Malvern, he "played a very great part" in the subsequent development of the two Rhodesias.<sup>1</sup> After his death, Brand recalled Malcolm's gregariousness, wit and "profoundly Christian character".<sup>2</sup> Intellectually, he appears to have been solid rather than acute. Fundamentally conservative, especially on matters relating to the dependent Empire, Malcolm was nevertheless one of Curtis's closest allies on federation.

Milner's influence was again crucial in Geoffrey Dawson's appointment as editor of *The Times*, a position he held (with the brief exception of the years 1919-23) from 1912 until 1941. As such he was "one of the half-dozen most influential men in Britain", in A L Rowse's view.<sup>3</sup> Dawson's reputation (like Lothian's) has suffered enormously from his association with the policy of "appeasement"; at the time, however, he was widely respected as a model of conservative journalism, even (as during the abdication crisis) the keeper of the nation's conscience. His insider's information on high politics and his contacts around the globe were undoubtedly of enormous benefit to the Round Table. In turn, Dawson appreciated the opportunities for discussion provided by the Moot.

1 [Brand,] "Dougal Orme Malcolm", *RT*, Dec 1955, p 5.

2 "B" [Brand], *The Times*, 2 Sept 1955.

3 A L Rowse, *All Souls and Appeasement* (London, 1961), p 2.

Nevertheless, his direct contribution to the Round Table was often limited by the demands of his job. After his retirement he attended Moots more frequently "to make amends . . . for years in which I have done nothing whatever to help".<sup>1</sup>

George Craik was Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police from 1910 to 1914. After war service with the Lovat Scouts, he was appointed Managing Director of the Commonwealth Trust. Before 1914 he was an active member of the Moot, especially in the magazine committee. He appears to have been particularly close to Oliver, with whom he shared a deep conservatism and an interest in Irish affairs.

John Dove was the exception among the "Kindergarten": ill-health prevented him from leading an active public life until the last years of the war, when he joined the War Office Intelligence Department. A brief spell as travelling representative of the Commonwealth Trust was followed in 1920 by his appointment as editor of *The Round Table*, a position he held until his death in 1934. Of all the "Kindergarten" members, Dove's contribution is hardest to gauge. Deeply religious, modest to the point of obtuseness, "he came as near to real saintliness as is given to our frail humanity".<sup>2</sup> Dove often appears to have been overawed by his more energetic colleagues, particularly Curtis, and even as editor his personality seems to have left little mark on the *Round Table*.

Other "Kindergarten" associates were included in lists of Moot members, and most attended meetings whenever they were in England.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Dawson to Curtis, 2 May 1941, RT Papers c 861, fol 11.

2 Malcolm to Grigg, 21 Apr 1934, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1004.

3 "The Moot", [1914,] (Moot file,) RT (O) Papers.

Duncan, Feetham and Wyndham were closely involved in the South African leg of the Round Table. Duncan pursued a successful career in politics, ending his life as Governor-General of South Africa. Feetham pursued an equally successful career in law. Between the wars he chaired commissions and inquiries in India, Ireland, Kenya and Shanghai. Wyndham returned to England in 1930, but appears not to have re-established his membership of the Moot. The architect Sir Herbert Baker was also listed as a Round Table member, but he attended meetings very irregularly. Perry moved to Canada (as representative for Lazard Bros) in 1912. He contributed a number of *Round Table* articles from there, and briefly re-joined the Moot in the early 1930s. Marris and Neston attended meetings more frequently, thanks to generous I.C.S. leave. Both were important influences on the Round Table's Indian policy.

By the end of 1910 the Moot was joined by Lord Robert Cecil, brother of Maud Selborne, and a free-trade High Tory whom the "Kindergarten" welcomed "to protect us from preferential propaganda".<sup>1</sup> Cecil was an active participant in several early sub-committees, but dropped out after taking office in 1915. A more assiduous contributor was recruited in mid-1912, in the person of Edward Grigg, a journalist who had worked on the Chamberlainite *Outlook* before joining *The Times*. From 1913 Grigg was employed as joint editor of the *Round Table* while continuing to provide regular articles for *The Times*. The arrangement was kept secret, in case the Round Table was compromised by association with "so powerful and (as Liberals think) so partizan an organ as 'The Times'".<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Kerr to Curtis, 7 Oct 1910, Lothian Papers 2, fols 124-6.

2 Grigg to S A Atkinson, 30 May 1913, RT Papers c 797, fols 109-11.

Although not Liberals, the last two individuals to join the prewar Moot, Reginald Coupland and Alfred Zimmern, were recruited partly to broaden the range of opinions within the group. Coupland's studies of Greece had convinced him that the decline of Hellenic power had resulted from "the fact that for all their internal patriotism the city-states could never combine".<sup>1</sup> Clearly already influenced by the precepts of "new" imperialism, Coupland fell under Curtis's spell during the latter's year as Beit Lecturer in 1912-13. The Moot, which regarded the Lectureship with something akin to proprietorial interest, agreed in May 1913 to support Coupland's candidature for the post and to invite him to join the group.<sup>2</sup> Thenceforth Coupland was to devote all his energies to the study of the history and contemporary politics of the Empire. Coupland counted himself a disciple of Ruskin and the early William Morris, and was always to be found on the more "democratic" wing of the Round Table.<sup>3</sup>

Zimmern was Coupland's senior by five years, and had been his tutor at New College. He shared many of the semi-socialist ideas of the "new" liberals Graham Wallas, Gilbert Murray and others, and was a leading figure in the Workers' Educational Association. He was particularly keen to ensure that the working class should "realize that the questions within the

- 
- 1 Coupland to Gilbert Murray, 14 Sept 1912, Coupland Papers 1/2/1; cf. Coupland, "The Growth of the City-State" (chapter 2 of a projected history of Greece), Coupland Papers 1/2/2.
  - 2 Minutes of RT meeting, 29 May 1913, RT Papers c 778, fol 127. Earlier, the Moot had "approved the proposal for offering the Beit Professorship [sic] at Oxford to Feetham", but the latter had refused it. (Minutes of meeting, 30 Dec 1912, c 777, fol 97.)
  - 3 See eg Coupland's lectures "The Spirit of William Morris" (nd), Coupland Papers, 1/2/5, and "Citizenship in the British Commonwealth" (10 Oct 1917), Lothian Papers 16, fols 497-525.

purview of an Imperial Parliament, Defence and Foreign Policy, are its concern".<sup>1</sup> It was Zimmern's links with the VEA, and the Moot's desire that "the two movements should keep as closely in touch as possible", which led to his inclusion in the Round Table.<sup>2</sup>

It is hardly necessary to emphasise that all the original Round Tablers came from wealthy and privileged backgrounds. Nevertheless, they were firmly convinced "that there were better goals in life than the making of money".<sup>3</sup> They all attended public schools at a time when, as Grigg recalled, these inculcated not only a "code", "how a man should behave and what he should strive to be", but a "creed", a "sense of . . . obligation to public service" and "a strong sense of the mission of the race".<sup>4</sup>

The Round Tablers' sense of "mission" was given further impetus by the strong religious inclinations which many of them shared. Oliver, who (with Brand) was unusually sceptical, went so far as to suggest that the group reconstitute itself as "God's Truth Ltd", and join in the money-making to be enjoyed from religious persuasion.<sup>5</sup> The Round Tablers' Christian convictions sometimes clouded their judgment. Curtis's belief that "the distinctions . . . between religion and politics . . . are false"<sup>6</sup> engendered a moralistic and subjective mode of discourse in which

- 1 Zimmern to Grigg, (nd, received 10 Aug 1914), RT Papers c 786, fols 143-4.
- 2 [Grigg] to Zimmern, 14 Feb 1914, RT Papers c 817, fols 14-15.
- 3 "Arthur J Glazebrook", *RT*, March 1941, p 340.
- 4 Grigg, *The Faith of an Englishman* (London, 1936), pp 381-5.
- 5 Oliver to Dawson, 11 June 1923, Oliver Papers 84, fols 46-7.
- 6 Curtis, "Memorandum for Discussion at Blickling", 19 Sept 1932, Lothian Papers 268, fol 743.

great emphasis was placed on faith, revelation and good intentions. Kerr doubted whether other religions "are capable of giving to their adherents that energy, fidelity to the right, brotherhood, public spirit and devotion to duty and the rule of law" which would enable them to enjoy the same measure of freedom and self-government as Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Another important influence on the Round Tablers' political psychology was the experience of "public service" which many of them had acquired. Kerr contended that "the secret of the success of the *Round Table* has been that it has been edited by people who have had a long experience of public affairs".<sup>2</sup> Such experience, however, was, in the case of the "Kindergarten" as of Milner, that of the unelected official. The younger Round Tablers therefore tended to share Milner's view that "administration" was "government in the true sense of the word". Moreover, the Round Table sought constantly to elaborate an ideal "National" policy which might be implemented without, and which might survive, the vagaries of electoral politics. This lent a peculiarly authoritative tone to Round Table pronouncements.

---

1 Kerr, "World Problems of Today" in *Approaches to World Problems* (New Haven, 1924), p 93.

2 Lothian to Curtis, 27 March 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fols 633-4.