

7. PROBLEMS OF EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH, 1919-39

Eggleston's complaint of 1932, that the *Round Table* had become a "British Review with appendices", was to a large extent justified. Only some 6% of identified "policy" articles published between the wars were by Dominion Round Tablers, compared to 20% before 1914.¹ It was true, also, that international affairs accounted for a greatly increased proportion of the *Round Table's* coverage. Nevertheless, Imperial and Commonwealth affairs, and especially the politics and relations of Britain and the self-governing Dominions, still provided the *Round Table's* primary focus. India now received roughly the same attention as each of the Dominions, but the other dependencies continued to be poorly represented.²

Empire and Commonwealth

Ironically, Curtis's favoured term "Commonwealth" came increasingly to rival "Empire" as the accepted description of the territories united under the British crown.³ Equally ironically, Curtis's "principle of the Commonwealth", which had caused such misgivings when first it made its appearance, now came to be "generally accepted" within the Moot, as he could claim in 1930.⁴ Curtis attributed the delay in accepting his thesis

¹ See Appendix D, "Round Table Articles, by Author".

² See Appendix C, "Round Table Coverage, by Subject".

³ S R Mehrotra, "On the Use of the Term 'Commonwealth'", *JCPS*, vol II, no 1 (Nov 1963), pp 10 ff; cf Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, Vol 1* (London, 1937), pp 32, 54 and 58.

⁴ Curtis to Hichens, Dawson, Brand and Lothian, 6 Aug 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fol 627.

to the process of "mental digestion".¹ Scarcely less important were the resignations or departures of some of Curtis's fiercest critics within the group, and the wartime and postwar disrepute into which the idea of "empire" fell.² Nevertheless, it would not seem unreasonable to speculate that Curtis's colleagues discovered what might be described as the propaganda value of his doctrine.

The Round Table's characteristic philosophy was elaborated not for merely academic purposes, but in the heat of controversy and with specific intentions. In the 1920s and 30s, Round Tablers were concerned to contrast their own progressive vision of Empire with the "old" imperialism of "diehards" such as Lady Milner, Winston Churchill and Lord Lloyd - whose insistence on outdated and unnecessary forms of control they believed would lead to a colossal increment in the forces of indigenous nationalism and anti-imperialism.³

Primarily, however, the Round Tablers were concerned to disarm the enemies of Empire, amongst whom they numbered Dominion, Irish, Egyptian and Indian nationalists; American anti-imperialists; internationalists of the League of Nations Union type; and assorted radicals such as Norman Leys (whom Round Tablers regarded as "a fanatic", and who in turn described Curtis as "one of the three wholly evil people I have ever met"⁴). To

1 Ibid.

2 Milner recognised that the word "empire" conjured up a vista of "conquest, of domination, of the oppression of the weak by the strong": *Questions of the Hour* (London, 1923), p 112.

3 See, eg, Grigg to Lady Milner, 30 May 1933, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1005, accusing her and Churchill of "short-sightedness".

4 Grigg to Lovat Fraser, 7 Aug 1925, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002; Paul B Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), p 83, quoting Leonard Barnes' unpublished autobiography.

this list the interwar years added another, perhaps more dangerous, threat: Bolshevism. As early as July 1917, Kerr saw this creed as the main enemy of "the people of the British Isles, who almost alone clearly comprehend . . . the dominant idea of the Commonwealth - loyalty to principle and loyalty to the whole".¹ Likewise, Curtis described the "principles" for which the British Commonwealth stood as being locked in mortal combat "with those of Marx, which are their negation".²

Two aspects of the Commonwealth "principle" might be distinguished, although it was their combination in the historical and contemporary Empire by which Round Tablers set most store: "unity" and "freedom". Frank Pakenham was right in describing Curtis as being "on the side of the big significant forces".³ The essence of the Round Table argument was that, as law was the only substitute for war, it was the citizen's duty to recognise the overriding claim of the highest authority to which he was subject, which in the British case was the "embryo" and "model" of the future world-state.⁴ Internationalism was harnessed to the cause of Empire, which was projected as a brave experiment in "fusing nationalism and racialism . . . into a higher unity".⁵

The second component of the "Commonwealth" argument was that the

- 1 Kerr to Curtis, 21 July 1917, Lothian Papers 33, fols 19-21.
- 2 Curtis to Hichens, Dawson, Brand and Lothian, 6 Aug 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fol 629; cf "Memorandum for discussion at Blickling", 19 Sept 1932, Lothian Papers 268, fols 742-51.
- 3 Frank Pakenham (Lord Longford), *Peace by Ordeal* (London, 1935), p 141.
- 4 See, eg, Kerr's Williamstown Lectures of 1923, in Kerr and Curtis, *The Prevention of War* (New Haven, 1923).
- 5 Grigg to Jeffrey Williams, 9 May 1933, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1004.

British Empire existed in order to assist its peoples towards freedom - that it was, indeed, the world's "great nursery of national states, coloured as well as white".¹ In Curtis's hands, the argument was often pursued ad absurdum, as when he claimed that the first British invaders of India were "all unconsciously laying [the] foundations" for "a structure of government based on the principle of the commonwealth".² In the writings of other Round Tablers the argument was put forward in a more sophisticated form. Coupland, in particular, deserves recognition as one of the ablest exponents of the "constitutional procession" interpretation of Imperial history, in which Britain's various dependencies were held to be moving at different stages along a well-worn path "of assimilation or equalization", from direct rule through innumerable levels of representation towards full responsible government.³

The Round Tablers' conception of the "constitutional procession" left great scope for the continued exercise of Imperial power. In the first place, the "habits of mind upon which self-government is based cannot begin to develop unless they are policed, advised, and to a great extent administered by some stable power from without".⁴ Imperial supervision was necessary right up to the point of full internal self-government. Gandhi was wrong in thinking that suffering was itself an education in self-government: "the breakdown of government . . . precludes any training

¹ Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, Volume Two (London, 1937), p 336.

² *Ibid.*, p 119.

³ See Coupland, *The Empire in These Days* (London, 1935), p 179 and passim. The term "constitutional procession" was coined by Zimmern: *The Third British Empire* (London, 1926), p 8.

⁴ [Kerr,] "The Price of Liberty", *RT*, Dec 1919, p 18.

in self-government".¹ Setbacks were indeed inevitable. The *Round Table* pointed to the interwar experience in Cyprus and Ceylon as evidence of "the kind of difficulties that are likely to arise when representative institutions are granted to a people whose capacity to govern is still open to question".²

The Round Table's attachment to the principle of self-government was further constrained by the belief, held by most Round Tablers throughout the period 1919-1939, that the dependencies could never be given independence outside the Commonwealth. Internal self-government was one thing; control of defence and foreign policy quite another. The point was emphasised whenever the question of Indian constitutional advance was addressed.³ Hodson argued in 1931 and again in 1939 that Indian self-government would have to include control of external affairs.⁴ Nevertheless, as late as 1943, Coupland found it impossible to conceive of an "independent Indian foreign policy and defence".⁵

It should be noted, finally, that it was by no means clear to all Round Tablers that the Westminster model was always an appropriate one. Coupland emphasised that "Dominion self-government" did not necessarily

¹ Curtis, "Memorandum for Discussion at Blickling", 19 Sept 1932, Lothian Papers 268, fol 744.

² [Isaac Foot,] "A Legislature for Palestine?" *RT*, June 1936, pp 513-15.

³ See, eg, Curtis, *Letters to the People of India on Responsible Government* (London edn, 1918), p 61; [Lothian,] "India: Constitution or Chaos", *RT*, March 1931, pp 269 ff.

⁴ Hodson to Dove, 27 Feb 1931, Lothian Papers 253, fols 718-25; Hodson, "The Round Table" [circulated 6 Jan 1939], Brand Papers, box 153.

⁵ Coupland, *The Future of India* (Oxford, 1943), p 174.

entail adoption of a parliamentary model.¹ More emphatically, Grigg asserted that the latter was "entirely devoid of flexibility and quite incapable of engendering the essential spirit of compromise in countries where racial and communal divisions present the principal political difficulty".² Grigg himself outlined an alternative, corporatist model for East Africa in 1934, and although he achieved no success in "trying . . . to make Lionel [Curtis] take on something of this kind", he received warm support from Duncan, Malcolm and Richard Jebb. (Malcolm and Jebb both suggested that corporatism should also be applied to Britain.)³

It is clear, then, that the Round Table's commitment to self-government in the dependencies was by no means straightforward. Their development of the language of "Commonwealth" was undoubtedly important, but it was affirmative rather than critical. The reasons why the group was sometimes prominent amongst those who urged an accelerated advance towards self-government are to be found less in any a priori attachment to the democratic principle than in a pragmatic response to the fragility of British power.

Trusteeship and Development

The "principle of the Commonwealth" was in many ways simply an application of "trusteeship" to the constitutional sphere. Although the former principle was the Round Table's characteristic contribution to the

¹ Coupland, *The Empire in These Days* (London, 1935), p 115; cf his letter to *The Times*, 20 Feb 1935.

² Grigg, *The British Commonwealth* (London, 1943), p 62.

³ Grigg, *The Constitutional Problem in Kenya* (Nottingham, 1934); Grigg to Duncan, 21 March 1934, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1004; Duncan to Grigg, 25 Feb 1934, Malcolm to Grigg, 21 April 1934, Jebb to Grigg, 4 Feb 1934, *ibid.*

debate on Empire, the latter continued to inform much Round Table writing on the dependencies. Coupland in particular preferred "trusteeship" to "Commonwealth", but other Round Tablers (including Curtis) also tended to use the terms interchangeably.¹ In his wartime *Round Table* articles, Kerr anticipated Lugard's more famous statement of the case by a number of years when he asserted that dependencies were held in trust not only on behalf of their inhabitants, but also "on behalf of civilization".²

The Round Table was, of course, not unusual in suggesting that British rule either was or should be characterised by "trusteeship". The principle was common currency amongst all shades of opinion on the Empire. Nevertheless, different shades clearly attached different weight to the idea, and injected into it different contents. Here, again, the Round Table was to be found playing a mediating rôle: seeking on the one hand to disarm the critics of Empire, and on the other to limit the influence of less progressive exponents of the Imperial ethic.

Round Tablers were acutely sensitive to the charge that "all the talk about 'trusteeship'" was "merely camouflage or cant", and that British rule had been imposed for no "other purpose than to smooth the profitable path of British trade".³ The locus classicus of such an interpretation was J A Hobson's *Imperialism* of 1902. After one bruising encounter with its author, Curtis was driven to exclaim: "One's heart bleeds for Hobson! It

¹ See, eg, [Curtis,] *Material for Indian Chapter* [1916], RT Papers c 828, fols 338 and passim.

² [Kerr,] "The Harvest of War", *RT*, Dec 1915, p 13. For Lugard, see *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London, 1922), p 18 and passim.

³ Coupland, *The Empire in These Days* (London, 1935), pp 163-64.

must hurt I should imagine to think so ill of men in general!"¹

Nevertheless, Hobson's critique found increasing favour. It was clearly insufficient simply to impute a malignant intention to those who adopted such a critique. Indeed, it was "imperative . . . to counteract the increasing vogue" of their "dangerous half-truths".² This the Round Table sought to do partly by emphasising that Britain derived no particular economic advantage from the control of her colonies, nor should seek to do so.

With the exception of Grigg, the Moot was firmly opposed to the Chamberlainite tradition of imperialism, still upheld by the likes of Amery, which regarded the colonies as "undeveloped estates" to be exploited for the sole benefit of the metropolitan economy.³ The majority of Round Table members remained firmly committed both to free trade orthodoxy and to an interpretation of "trusteeship" in which the maintenance of an "open door" made moral and political, as well as economic, sense. In 1926 the *Round Table* argued that the abandonment of Britain's "open door" policy would excite the hostility of other powers, especially the United States; in 1930 Harold Butler invoked the example of the Thirteen Colonies to warn against arousing the resentment of the inhabitants of the dependencies themselves.⁴ Both arguments were deployed in 1932, in anticipation of the Ottawa

1 Curtis to Coupland, 29 Nov 1916, RT Papers c 817, fols 169-70.

2 Coupland, "The Study of the British Commonwealth" (inaugural lecture as Beit Professor, Oxford, 19 Nov 1921), reprinted in *The Empire in These Days* (London, 1935), p 22.

3 For Grigg, see "The British Empire, the League of Nations and the Rhodes Ideal", [circulated 28 Sept 1932,] Lothian Papers 268, fols 753-89.

4 "Post-War Tendencies in Empire Trade", *RT*, Sept 1926, pp 690-703; [H Butler,] "Imperial Economic Unity", *RT*, Sept 1930, pp 745-65.

Conference.¹

When the British Government did impose tariff preferences in the non-mandated colonies, followed by anti-Japanese quotas and duties, Coupland replied with a forceful denunciation of a policy which "goes far to justify what is said abroad of our national hypocrisy".² Hodson again pressed in 1937 for an urgent reconsideration of a policy which threw into question the whole moral basis of British rule. "Is a trustee . . . entitled to make a commercial arrangement with himself on behalf of his ward which is to his own profit, even though it also be to his ward's?" The *Round Table's* answer was a clear and unequivocal "no".³

While the Moot was thus fervently opposed to an economic policy in the dependencies which favoured Britain at the expense of other developed countries, there was no hostility to the idea of Western economic penetration as such. Indeed, the argument that "the white man who seeks to develop the resources" of a colony was "a natural enemy of the native" was thought to be the reverse of the truth.⁴ As Coupland argued,

"Livingstone linked commerce with Christianity as a means of fulfilling our duty to 'civilise' Africa. And it is becoming more and more obvious in these days that the execution of a 'trust' for the welfare of the natives . . . depends for its efficiency on an adequate local revenue, which in turn depends on economic development".⁵

¹ [Hodson,] "Imperial Preference", *RT*, March 1932, pp 246-65.

² [Coupland,] "The Future of Colonial Trusteeship", *RT*, Sept 1934, pp 732-45.

³ [Hodson,] "Colonial Tariffs and Quotas", *RT*, Dec 1937, pp 92-109.

⁴ [Kerr,] "The Next Imperial Conference", *RT*, March 1926, pp 227-55 .

⁵ [Coupland,] "The Future of Colonial Trusteeship", *RT*, Sept 1934, p 734.

"Philanthropy and five per cent" were, thus, far from incompatible.

Moreover, it was part of the Empire's "trusteeship" to ensure that the natural resources of the colonies were made available to the developed economies of the West.¹

Only slowly did it dawn on the Round Tablers that relatively few of the benefits of economic development reached the inhabitants of the colonies themselves. At the time of Labour's 1929 Colonial Development Act, Kerr wrote to Garvin that Britain's record in her dependent Empire - compared to France's or America's - had been an "economic failure", and that "we never really tackled the problem of raising the standard of living of the people".² Nevertheless, it was only after the outbreak of riots in the West Indies that the *Round Table* began to tackle the problem. Even then, the solution proffered was not an adjustment of the economic advantages within the colonies or between the colonies and metropolis, but "the provision of some outlet . . . for the surplus population".³ The principle of financial self-sufficiency was still being upheld by Sir Selwyn Grier in March 1939, although he broke new ground by championing the interests of the producer against those of the monopolistic trading companies.⁴

Lord Hailey's *African Survey* has often been credited with leading the shift towards state-assisted colonial development which took place at the beginning of the Second World War. J W Cell has shown that Hailey himself

¹ [Hodson,] "Colonial Raw Materials", *RT*, March 1936, pp 306-14.

² Kerr to Garvin, 23 Sept 1929, Lothian Papers 236, fols 244-46.

³ "Imperial Responsibilities in the West Indies", *RT*, Sept 1938, pp 692-707.

⁴ [Grier,] "Problems of British West Africa", *RT*, March 1939, pp 291-308.

was in fact "just in time to catch the tide" initiated primarily by Malcolm MacDonald and the Fabians.¹ There is no evidence to suggest that other members of the Round Table were of importance in this shift. On the other hand they rapidly adjusted themselves to the new way of thinking. By 1942, Hailey was calling in the *Round Table* for "a new conception" of metropolitan-colonial relations which would include a "far more effective intervention on our part to promote their development than the traditions of a previous generation had contemplated".²

India: "Constitution or Chaos"

The Round Table's dealings with India between 1910 and 1919 illustrated the importance of personal contacts and individual interest in the evolution of Moot policy. Both were more limited in scope for the first decade after 1919. Curtis appears to have lost interest in India, and Dove was the only member of the Moot to visit the country in the early 1920s. Meston left India early in 1920. Marris remained until 1928, but he was by no means willing to initiate any new directions in Round Table policy. The Round Tablers' main contacts in India were their regular correspondents. Rushbrook Williams and Coatman were successive directors of Public Information, and Stephens worked for the same department; Yeatts was an official in the Home Department. Curtis and Kerr both attempted to enliven the magazine with contributions from native Indians, but the majority of the Moot was unwilling to undertake any such "experiment".³

¹ J W Cell, *Hailey* (Cambridge, 1992), p 240.

² [Hailey,] "The Future of the Colonies", *RT*, Dec 1942, pp 8-16.

³ Minutes of RT meeting, 31 July 1929, RT (O) Papers; Miss Handley to Kerr, 11 Feb 1930, Lothian Papers 244, fol 613.

Grigg complained in 1931 that the *Round Table's* Indian chronicles consisted largely of "wandering comments on the fluctuations of Indian opinion".¹ There was much truth in his criticism. Coatman admitted that Indian politics left him "puzzled and irritated".² It was generally believed that the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms went far towards meeting the demands of the nationalist movement. (Similarly, the missionary official J H Oldham thought that the reforms gave Indians "the power . . . of wresting, within a measurable period of time, complete swaraj".³) The nationalist attitude was therefore proof that Indians were not yet "fit for self-government".⁴

The question of some further constitutional advance was raised as early as November 1920 by E ff Lascelles, a former New Zealand Round Tabler now employed as a lecturer by the Indian Army. Lascelles was highly critical of the ICS's lack of "political sense", and suggested various measures to accustom the Service to working under responsible government.⁵ (None, incidentally, was advocated by the *Round Table*.) Turning to the constitutional sphere,

"There is one thing of which I feel certain: it is that it will not be possible to wait for the statutory period of ten years before the next advance is made. I think that it is essential that forward thinking should be done from the outset and that we should make concessions before they are demanded Round

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- 1 Grigg to Hichens, 15 Dec 1931, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1003.
 - 2 [Coatman,] "The Inwardness of the Indian Problem", *RT*, June 1926, p 302.
 - 3 Oldham [to Dove?], 31 Dec 1921, Lothian Papers 19, fols 232-39.
 - 4 [R Williams,] "India: A Survey of the Situation", *RT*, Dec 1924, p 149.
 - 5 Lascelles to Kerr, 18 Dec 1919, Lothian Papers 213, fols 77-81.

Table thinking is very necessary just now. My impression is that India wants Curtis again".¹

Little came of this letter. Kerr wrote back that, in the opinion of the Moot, Her Majesty's Government had, if anything, been over-generous with its reforms. It was now up to Indians to work them.²

By 1923, there was considerable discussion within Government of India circles of the causes of the political impasse. (This led to the appointment of the Muddiman Committee in 1924, whose majority reported the following year that the main cause of deadlock was the irresponsible attitude of Indian politicians.³) In April 1923 a memorandum, apparently by Curtis, discussed the desirability or otherwise of some further British declaration of aims. The memorandum failed to come to a decision one way or the other, but posited something short of Dominion self-government, with no responsibility for defence or foreign policy, as the "ultimate limit" which India would reach in "three or four generations, perhaps longer".⁴

The extent of Indian unrest could not forever be obscured by a cloud of condemnation and wishful thinking. The early appointment of the Simon Commission in 1927 acknowledged this fact; its reception in India confirmed it. Once again, the question of Indian constitutional reform forced itself onto the British agenda.

In June 1928 the Round Table re-instituted its "Indian Moot", now consisting of Curtis, Dove, Feetham, Kerr and Marris. Curtis was deputed

¹ Lascelles to Kerr, 24 Nov 1920, Lothian Papers 214, fols 113-5.

² Kerr to Lascelles, 24 Dec 1920, Lothian Papers 214, fols 121-23.

³ *Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee . . . appointed by the Government of India* (Cmd 2360), 1925.

⁴ [Curtis?,] "India" [circulated to Moot 6 April 1923], Brand Papers, box 70.

to write for the *Round Table* on the "broad questions of principle".¹ Probably because of a divergence of views within the "Indian Moot", Curtis's article was somewhat anodyne: welcoming the opportunity for review, but impressing a good deal of caution.² Meanwhile, Dawson was striking out somewhat further than his colleagues. Between December 1928 and March 1929 he visited India, and on his return he wrote a large number of leaders and articles on India "with the idea of educating the public at home" on the necessity of some forward move. (*The Times'* Indian coverage was subsequently printed as a pamphlet to show that the English press was "not unconstructive".)³

The divergence of views within the "Indian Moot" finally came to a head towards the end of 1929. The occasion was provided by Marris's article commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Reforms. Marris came close to acknowledging the failure of the 1919 Act, which "nobody for choice would wish to see . . . indefinitely prolonged". Nevertheless, he saw a "difficulty . . . in extracting from its record any sure guidance for the future", and offered a gloomy prognosis for the forthcoming Simon Report, as bound to run into the same problems of Indian "irresponsibility" and unrealistic expectations.⁴

Kerr wrote to Marris, trying to persuade him to change the tone of his article. Britain was in India as an "indispensable adviser" not as of

1 Minutes of RT meeting, 12 June 1928, RT (O) Papers.

2 [Curtis,] "The Task of the Simon Commission", *RT*, Sept 1928, pp 685-713.

3 Dawson, Notes on Indian Tour and subsequent articles, Dawson Papers 83, fols 141-45; cf R J Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-40* (Oxford, 1974), pp 47-48.

4 [Marris,] "India and 1930", *RT*, Dec 1929, pp 50-78.

"divine right". He identified a fundamental "defect" in Marris's article,

"that it assumes that Great Britain alone, with the advice of the Simon Commission, has got to decide about the future of the Indian Constitution. In the strictly constitutional sense this is true. In the political sense I believe it is quite untrue".¹

Marris refused to make the changes Kerr requested: the idea "that Indian sentiment must not merely be consulted, but appeased", might be "the Round Table's view but it is not my view and so I cannot write it".²

Kerr's controversy with Marris was really over a question of degree: Marris did not deny that Indians should be consulted and, where possible, won over, while Kerr still saw a large rôle for the British in assessing Indian claims. Nevertheless, Kerr and the Round Table were now more inclined to place more responsibility for finding a solution in Indian hands. The substantive reason for this was a realisation that otherwise British rule would lead "through Black and Tannery to inevitable defeat".³

The "Irwin Declaration" of 31 October 1929 committed the Government to the policy which Kerr had urged on Marris.⁴ The concomitant pledge that Dominion status was "the natural issue of India's constitutional progress" subsequently aroused much opposition. Marris thought that it would merely encourage Indians to press for a complete British withdrawal.⁵ From South

1 Kerr to Marris, 23 Oct 1929, Lothian Papers 237, fols 327-32.

2 Marris to Kerr, 25 Oct 1929, Lothian Papers 237, fols 333-4. Marris's emphasis. Marris's article was printed as it stood, owing to the lack of time for finding a new writer: Miss Handley to Marris, 28 Oct 1929, Lothian Papers 237, fol 338.

3 Kerr to Marris, 23 Oct 1929, Lothian Papers 237, fols 327-32.

4 The Declaration was issued despite considerable opposition from within the Cabinet and elsewhere: see R J Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-40* (Oxford, 1974) pp 41-94, and J Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience* (Cambridge, 1977), pp 42 ff.

5 Marris to Lothian, 24 July 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fols 612-18.

Africa, Duncan opposed the idea on different grounds:

"India will never fit in as a Dominion in the existing scheme of the British Commonwealth. Her coming in will help to break such bonds as still are left of unity. The alternatives are to hold her by force or let her go and of these two I prefer the latter We can't afford it and she isn't worth it".¹

Neither Marris's nor Duncan's views found favour with the Moot. Dawson gave Irwin's declaration a hearty endorsement in *The Times*,² while in the *Round Table* Kerr welcomed it as "statesmanlike". Britain had now accepted the case for self-government; "the question to be decided is the practical one, as to how far and at what pace responsibility can be safely transferred".³

Given Kerr's acknowledgement of the need to conciliate, if not appease, Indian opinion, what is surprising is how limited were the steps he favoured. After seeing the Simon Commission's provisional scheme, he suggested further reservations: that the Governors should possess more powers than a "constitutional monarch"; and that the executives be opened to non-elected individuals nominated by the Chief Minister or Governor.⁴ At the level of central government, Kerr saw "democracy" as "entirely out of the question". He suggested a consultative Assembly consisting of delegations from provincial legislatures, and a Council - with undefined powers - entirely selected by the Viceroy.⁵ Kerr's suggestions represented a considerable advance on the 1919 Reforms, but they fell far short both of

1 Duncan to Dove, 29 Dec 1931, RT Papers c 813, fols 63-65.

2 *The Times*, 1 Nov 1929.

3 [Kerr,] "Where are We Going?" *RT*, March 1930, p 231.

4 Kerr to Simon, 3 March 1930, Lothian Papers 253, fols 779-83.

5 Kerr to Simon, 10 March 1930, Lothian Papers 253, fols 784-92.

Dominion status (even as interpreted before the 1926 Conference) and of Indian expectations.

The Simon Commission's proposals had already "been overtaken by British initiatives" by the time they were published.¹ The Moot was still intent on "emphasising the importance of fixing a limit beyond which Great Britain cannot go"², but it soon became clear that a more positive response was needed. At a meeting at the end of July 1930, attended by Coatman but not Marris, the Moot agreed that after the Simon Report had advocated responsible government in the provinces, "it was impossible not to go further" and introduce "a measure of responsibility" at the centre. Control of the ICS, the Army, the frontier province, relations with the princes and the Consolidated Fund would, however, remain under the direct control of the Viceroy.³

Kerr/Lothian was deputed to appraise the Report for the *Round Table*. He devoted a large part of his article to a plea for collaboration.

"The real task before India is not to get rid of the British Raj Indeed, the greatest danger to India today is that Great Britain may become too ready to throw off her responsibility and to leave India to 'stew in her own juice' Indians should assume the actual responsibility for a large part of Indian government, and demonstrate their capacity to maintain themselves in power and to carry on a just and efficient administration, before the steadying hand of Britain is wholly removed."

Having acknowledged that the Simon Report "has no friends" in India, Lothian proceeded to praise its generosity and even suggested that it went "dangerously far". No mention was made of the further steps agreed by the

1 J Brown, *Modern India: the Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford, 1985), p 256.

2 Dove to Lothian, 8 July 1930, Lothian Papers 251, fols 600-02.

3 Minutes of RT meeting, 31 July 1930, RT (O) Papers.

Moot, only of the idea of "fixing a limit".¹ Criticised by Dove for omitting the Moot's "positive suggestion", Lothian argued that to have included proposals for constitutional moves at the centre would not have helped the Round Table Conference (to which he had been appointed one of the Liberal delegates). Some concession by Britain was inevitable, but it was important for Indians to be seen to share responsibility for whatever scheme might emerge.²

The first Round Table Conference was remarkable mainly for the Princes' agreement to the idea of an all-India federation. Lothian, like other British participants, saw this as a godsend. In an article for the *Round Table* - 2000 copies of which were printed as a pamphlet and circulated to every MP as well as in India and the United States³ - he stated enthusiastically that the Conference "has started India and Great Britain on a new road from which there can be no turning back".⁴

After a discussion of the implications of the Princes' announcement, Amery recorded Lothian's opinion that

"the control at the centre will be in the hands of the Princes who will not only command a third of the members in the Legislature but have no difficulty whatever in buying up the others. His whole picture in fact was one of a thoroughly corrupt but otherwise peaceful and monarchical India".⁵

Lothian put the case more circumspectly in the *Round Table*. There would be

¹ [Lothian,] "The Crisis in India", *RT*, Sept 1930, pp 679-708.

² Lothian to Dove, 27 Aug 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fol 642, replying to Dove to Lothian, 20 Aug 1930, *ibid*, fols 638-41.

³ Lothian to Dove, 13 March 1931, Lothian Papers 253, fol 713.

⁴ [Lothian,] "India: Constitution or Chaos", *RT*, March 1931, p 240.

⁵ J Barnes and D Nicholson (eds), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929-45* (London, 1988), p 296 (entry of 16 June 1933).

little place for Congress radicalism in an all-India federation. While Britain should retain certain essential powers (such as nomination of the Viceroy and, through him, control of the army, of foreign policy, and of currency, debt and financial stability), federation provided the means whereby the remaining functions of central government could pass from British hands without fear of "revolutionary" consequences.¹

Lothian was closely involved with the formulation of a constitutional scheme for India, as a delegate to the two further Round Table Conferences in 1931-2, as Under-Secretary at the India Office, and as chairman of the Franchise Committee which toured India early in 1932. During his visit to India he was largely but unsuccessfully concerned with holding the Princes to their commitment to federation. Lothian was also a member of the Joint Select Committee which examined the Government of India Bill.² Coupland weighed the niceties of the status which the Bill would confer on India, and judged that it would leave her "in the penultimate stage" of her "advance to Dominion Status": a position "similar in principle to that in Canada, say, before 1871 or in South Africa before 1914".³

Hodson argued that further concessions might be needed (including control of defence and foreign policy), since Congress was clearly "the only real political force".⁴ Nevertheless, for the majority of the Moot as for the Government, the position reached by early 1931 - provincial

1 [Lothian,] "India: Constitution or Chaos", *RT*, 3.31, pp 268 ff.

2 Lothian's rôle as Under-Secretary and chairman of the Franchise Committee is examined in Gerard Douds, "Lothian and the Indian Federation", pp 62-76 of John Turner, *The Larger Idea* (London, 1988).

3 Coupland, "India and Dominion Status" (dated Oct 1934), in *The Empire in These Days* (London, 1935), pp 157 and 151.

4 Hodson to Dove, 27 Feb 1931, Lothian Papers 253, fols 718-25.

self-government "with safeguards", and all-Indian federation with limitations - represented the ne plus ultra, "the limit to which the scope of Indian self-government can be extended at the present time".¹ The Round Table therefore acted as a pressure group on Government policy only tangentially, helping to keep it on the lines laid down in 1929-31; its main purpose was to defend and win support for that policy against its critics in India and Britain.

Undoubtedly the most dangerous threat to the reforms was the "diehard" opposition emanating from the right of the Tory party.² Dawson's *Times* was once again prominent in support of Government policy, and in attacking those who urged "that the ideal of Indian hopes is to be a new and inferior grade of constitutional status".³ Grigg offered suggestions on how to tackle criticism of the constitutional and financial aspects of the Reforms.⁴ (In 1933 he returned to Parliament as MP for Altrincham, after defeating Randolph Churchill.) At one point, Lothian and Curtis were involved with Irwin, Sir Stanley Reed and Patrick Young in planning a "Round Table [Conference] Society" to rally "moderate Conservative" opinion and dispel "doubts" and "suspicions" in India. The society never materialised, however, probably through failure to secure the support of Zetland, whose leadership was thought essential.⁵

1 Coupland, loc cit, p 150.

2 See Carl Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire* (New York, 1986).

3 *The Times*, 28 Nov 1931; Dawson's policy is well covered by Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times* (London, 1955), chapters 23-27.

4 See, eg, Grigg to Dove, 7 June 1932, Lothian Papers 267, fols 711-14.

5 See "Note of Conclusions Reached", 5 July 1932, Lothian Papers 263, fols 219-20; also Sir Stanley Reed's draft letter to potential supporters [sent 25 July 1932], Lothian Papers 267, fols 642-44.

Such was the gravity of the issue that it was thought possible that Baldwin might have to split his party to uphold the "national" principle.¹ The Round Table's frustration with the "diehards" was increased by the belief that at most they could delay reform until Labour returned to office; then a more radical scheme would be bound to emerge.²

To the Round Table's immense relief, the Government managed to override "diehard" opposition and place the Government of India Act on the statute book. Within months of its passage, the *Round Table* detected an "increasingly realist attitude . . . developing in the political parties in India".³ Lothian helped pave the way for Congress moderates to participate in provincial government, by assuring them that Governors would be unlikely to use their reserved powers against a ministry enjoying electoral support.⁴ The Viceroy, Linlithgow, initially regarded Lothian's interference as unhelpful.⁵ Nevertheless, he soon made similar assurances, and Congress at last decided to enter the electoral fray. The *Round Table* praised this decision as a "triumph for moderate forces". Indeed, it was now thought possible to assert with confidence that "underlying most Indian opinion is a strong faith in the value of the British connection".⁶

1 [Hodson et al,] "Great Britain: the Slippery Slope", *RT*, June 1934, p 609.

2 [Stephens,] "India: Swaraj the Phoenix", *RT*, June 1934, p 570; cf Grigg to Lady Milner, 30 May 1933, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1003.

3 [Yeatts,] "Interregnum in India", *RT*, Dec 1935, p 124.

4 Letters to *The Times*, 6 and 13 April 1937, 17 and 21 Feb 1938.

5 Linlithgow to Lothian, 4 April 1938, Lothian Papers 364, fols 513-14.

6 [Inglis,] "An Indian Milestone", *RT*, Sept 1937, pp 809 and 819.

The Middle East

Britain's military successes against the Ottoman Empire ironically gave her a much enlarged rôle in the Middle East just at the time when she seemed to be losing her grip on Egypt. Amery saw in this a strategic windfall which would consolidate once and for all the "Southern British World" which stretched in an arc "from Cape Town to Wellington".¹ His former colleagues were far from convinced. "Every competent observer" recognised that "the people of these regions" could not "maintain order for themselves". Nevertheless, it was "not in the world's interest for England to add further to responsibilities already so greatly out of proportion to her relative strength".²

One solution to the problem, which Curtis advocated forcefully in December 1918, was for the United States to "make herself answerable to a League of Nations for peace, order, and good government in some or all of the regions of the Middle East".³ Curtis's suggestion caused some disagreement within the Moot. Coupland reported that it was stirring up considerable animosity from the Foreign Office.⁴ Nevertheless, the suggestion was again put forward a year later, with the complaint that while America vacillated things were steadily going "from bad to worse".⁵ America's decision not to undertake any such global responsibilities came as a disappointment to the Moot, which spent much of the following two decades trying to reverse the decision.

¹ See W R Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!* (New York, 1992), pp 68-70.

² "The Price of Liberty", *RT*, Dec 1919, pp 18-19.

³ [Curtis,] "Windows of Freedom", *RT*, Dec 1918, pp 33-34.

⁴ Coupland to Kerr, 20 Jan 1919, Lothian Papers 482 (single item).

⁵ [Toynbee,] "The Outlook in the Middle East", *RT*, Dec 1919, p 57.

Britain thus entered the 1920s with an extensive new rôle in the region. The *Round Table* was determined that Britain should do so "with open eyes". None of the territories now brought under the aegis of the Empire/Commonwealth was easily defensible by sea. Large sums would have to be found for the defence of frontiers, and if to these was added the burden of maintaining order amongst peoples who were "highly strung" and "prone to sudden spontaneous uprisings", it was "unlikely that the cost can be met". It was essential, therefore, that the cost "be lessened".¹

With the contemporary situation in Egypt firmly in mind, the solution which the *Round Table* now proffered was to limit Britain's liabilities to the bare essentials, and to seek the collaboration of indigenous groups. T E Lawrence was enlisted to advocate just such a policy in the *Round Table*. The earth, Lawrence contended, "is just a track along which countries and continents race with one another, and for all we know Asia may be gaining on us mentally". Nationalism was "too universal to be extinguished, too widespread to be temporary". The only way to channel it and to limit its "destructive" consequences was by "an active [policy] of imposing responsibility on the local peoples".

"They will not wish to take charge, but we can force their hand by preparing to go. We do not risk losing them to another power [If] assured of eventual dominion status, and present internal autonomy, [they] would be delighted to affiliate with us The alternative is to hold on to them with ever-lessening force, till the anarchy is too expensive, and we let go."²

The policy thus urged by the *Round Table* was in fact adopted by the British Government, at least in Iraq and Persia. The *Round Table* refrained from

1 *Ibid.*, pp 55-97.

2 [T E Lawrence,] "The Changing East", *RT*, Sept 1920, pp 756-72.

comment on the latter country, but Iraq was the subject of two complacent and self-congratulatory articles, in 1923 and 1926.'

In Palestine, there was less scope for the kind of solution advocated by the Round Table and subsequently pursued in Egypt and Iraq, because of the British commitment to a Jewish "national home" contained in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917.

On Zionism the Round Table's stance was again much less clear-cut than Amery's. The latter saw the establishment of a Jewish colony in Palestine as an important instrument of British strategic and economic penetration of the region.² Of the Round Tablers, only Zimmern consistently held this view. In 1916 his attempts to ventilate the issue through the *Round Table* ran up against the hostility of the rest of the Koot.³ The editors agreed to print a "contributed" article in 1918 by Leon Simon, who welcomed the Balfour Declaration as the first step to a "self-governing Jewish Commonwealth".⁴ Nevertheless, other *Round Table* articles took a different view. In 1919 Toynbee asserted that Jewish settlement would only create a new problem by "causing unrest among the local Christians and Moslems".⁵ The following year, T E Lawrence was equally

1 [Gertrude Bell,] "Great Britain and the 'Iraq", *RT*, Dec 1923, pp 64-83; "The Working of the 'Iraq Parliament", *RT*, Dec 1926, pp 18-36.

2 Amery, *My Political Life, Vol II* (London, 1953), pp 115-117; cf Louis, *op cit.*, pp 70-74, 89-94.

3 Zimmern to J A Hobson, 29 Sept 1916, *RT Papers* c 817, fols 152-58; Kerr to Zimmern, 29 Nov 1916, *ibid.*, fol 168.

4 [Leon Simon,] "Palestine and Jewish Nationalism" ("contributed"), *RT*, March 1918, pp 308-36.

5 [Toynbee,] "The Outlook in the Middle East", *RT*, Dec 1919, pp 82-83.

dismissive of Zionist schemes.¹

Some of the Round Tablers appear to have been won over by Zionism in the course of the 1920s. Kerr lent his support to schemes to reward Weizmann with a knighthood²; in 1928 he joined the Palestine Mandate Society. The Round Table as a whole remained unable to take a clear line on Palestine, convinced that "both Jew and Arab may make a good case in his defence".³ It was not until 1936 - when the antagonisms seemed intractable - that the *Round Table* resumed its coverage. Still, the Moot attempted to be even-handed, balancing one article which rejected the proposal of a legislative council (on the grounds that it would leave the Jews a permanent minority) with another which called for a limitation of Jewish immigration (and suggested that it be diverted to British Guiana).⁴

The Peel Commission of 1936-37, of which Coupland was a member and whose Report he drafted, saw partition as the only solution to the problem. Toynbee welcomed his Report as a "great state paper", the product of "moral courage" and "extreme intellectual ability". Nevertheless, he recognised that a "surgical operation" would not please the Arabs, and would leave two economically unviable units. He suggested, therefore, that partition should be accompanied by federation of both units with the Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, with a continued Anglo-French presence in the region.⁵ In

¹ [T E Lawrence,] "The Changing East", *RT*, Sept 1920, p 769.

² See, eg, Kerr to Sir Herbert Samuel, 4 Jan 1921, Lothian Papers 218, fols 668-9.

³ [Isaac Foot,] "A Legislature for Palestine?", *RT*, June 1936, p 512.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 503-17; [N Barbour,] "Palestine: the Commissioner's Task", *RT*, Dec 1936, pp 79-94. The suggestion concerning British Guiana was repeated by Harlow in June 1939.

⁵ [Toynbee,] "The Palestine Report and After", *RT*, Sept 1937, pp 740-54.

Toynbee's view, the whole region constituted "a natural and historic unity, which was artificially partitioned . . . to meet . . . the respective exigencies of British and French imperialism".¹

Southern Africa

Lack of criticism of South African policy was considered to be in the natives' best interests, as Curtis explained in *The Times* in 1935: "South Africans must and will find out for themselves what is right or wrong with their own policy. Lectures from us merely delay the process".²

Curtis's insistence on South African autonomy was no doubt sincere. Nevertheless, it concealed the very real extent of the Moot's sympathy with the trend of "native" policy in the Union. Close study of the problem of "poor whites", as well as a sense of foreboding, had led the "Kindergarten" towards a liberal form of segregationism. Kerr's conviction on this matter was strengthened as a result of his tour of the United States in 1909.³ On his return to England, Kerr wrote a long article for *The Times* in which he argued that segregation was the only way to enable "the native . . . to rise steadily in the scale of civilization".⁴ Similar views were held by other members of the Moot. In 1924 Grigg suggested to Bailey that the only solution to South Africa's Indian "problem" was that "you will have to end

1 [Toynbee,] "A Federal Solution" ("Editorial"), pp 268-77 of "Palestine: the Wider Hope", *RT*, March 1939, pp 252-77 (quotation from p 275); cf [Harlow,] "Palestine: A Leaf Turned", *RT*, June 1939, pp 457-75.

2 *The Times*, 15 May 1935; cf Curtis, "South Africa Since the Union", *Atlantic Monthly*, vol 140 (Aug 1927), p 263.

3 Kerr's notes from his American tour are preserved as Lothian Papers 5, fols 105-77.

4 *The Times*, 5 Nov 1910.

up by making a regular enclave and settlement for them in some special part of the Union".¹

Smuts's defeat by Hertzog in 1924, and the latter's more overtly racist policies, caused misgivings within the Moot, including fear of "a form of racial strife . . . which will eventually ramify all over Africa, and even Asia".² Nevertheless, it was the overtness of Hertzog's policies rather than their content which troubled Kerr:

"People will stand administrative discrimination But as soon as you make legal discrimination the rule, it stirs a totally different degree of animosity The negro problem is manageable in America largely because the Constitution makes no discrimination between black and white, though, as everybody knows, there is an immense amount of discrimination in practice".³

The advent of the Fusion Government in 1933, in which Duncan and Smuts were again cabinet ministers, was greeted with relief by the Moot. The introduction of new segregation laws and the disfranchisement of educated Africans appear to have caused little concern. The *Round Table's* South African committee quoted with approval Duncan's statement that, if such action were not taken, the African vote "would increase fast as education spread, and in fifty or a hundred years' time might tilt the balance fatally against the white vote".⁴

One aspect of white South African aspirations of which the "Selborne Memorandum" made good use was the possibility of the expansion of South

1 Grigg to Bailey, 10 April 1924, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1001.

2 [Kerr,] "The New Problem of Africa", *RT*, June 1927, p 457.

3 Kerr to Duncan, 13 April 1926, Lothian Papers 222, fols 130-31.

4 "Native Policy in South Africa", *RT*, June 1936, pp 540-41.

African influence northwards, which Union was thought to facilitate.' Such a possibility remained a strong element in subsequent Round Table speculation. In 1927 Kerr produced a report on the "African Highlands" for the Rhodes Trust, in which he argued that

"except for the coastal belt along the Indian ocean and certain lowlying valleys . . . the whole of [the region from Cape to Nairobi] . . . seems inevitably destined to be colonised in greater or lesser degree by the white man".

South African "experience" should guide British policy; South African influence was "bound to increase".² Two years later, the Moot discussed "the advisability of establishing an African Council, or some form of regular consultation between the British and South African Governments on East and Central African questions".³ As late as 1946 the editor of the *Round Table* was reporting that "our feeling here is that the Union must soon assume the status of the predominant power of all Africa".⁴

The Protectorates were the most obvious starting-point for such schemes. The "Kindergarten" had expected those territories to be transferred to South Africa as part of unification, but pressure from Britain ensured that responsibility remained with the British High Commissioner. Hertzog's government requested a reconsideration in 1925, but it was only after 1933 that the Round Tablers themselves believed the question to be amenable to a solution in South Africa's favour.

The first shot in the Round Table's campaign came in September 1934,

¹ B Williams, *The Selborne Memorandum* (Oxford, 1925), pp 140-45.

² Kerr, "The African Highlands", 25 Feb 1927, Lothian Papers 83, fols 4-23.

³ Minutes of RT meeting, 16 May 1929, RT (O) Papers.

⁴ Morrah to Kidd, 27 Feb 1946, (SA file,) RT (O) Papers.

with the printing of a South African article which claimed virtually unanimous support amongst white South Africans for the proposal.¹ Six months later, Horsfall announced the Moot's wholehearted agreement with the proposal. Much was made of the "complete economic and cultural dependence of the protectorates on the Union", and it was claimed that "South Africa . . . has not shown any lack of ability to find constructive solutions of great problems".²

Curtis was in South Africa for the Imperial Press Conference at the time the *Round Table* was declaring its position. He reiterated the latter's arguments in a widely-publicised speech in Cape Town.³ He was "genuinely surprised" by the reaction.⁴ On the boat back to England, Sir Roderick Jones reported to Smuts that he and Curtis were the only press delegates in favour of transfer.⁵ Back in England, Curtis encountered further "intensity of feeling" on the subject, even in All Souls.⁶ Undeterred, he composed a series of articles for *The Times* setting out the case for transfer, quoting Bishop Gore to the effect that "people tend to live up to the best opinion we are able to hold of them". Curtis played down the natives' views on the subject, because they were "not yet able to make major decisions in their own interests".⁷

1 "The Protectorates and the Union", *RT*, Sept 1934, pp 785-801.

2 [Horsfall,] "The South African Protectorates", *RT*, March 1935, pp 318-23.

3 Reported inter alia in the *Cape Times*, 23 March 1935.

4 Curtis to Feetham, 26 March 1935, Curtis Papers 91, fol 140. Sir William Clark and Sir Herbert Stanley were amongst Curtis's critics.

5 Jones to Smuts, 3 April 1935, *ibid*, fols 161-62.

6 Curtis to Duncan, 16 April 1935, *ibid*, fols 178-79.

7 *The Times*, 13, 14 and 15 May 1935.

Curtis's three *Times* articles were answered by a single one from Margery Perham, who, unlike Curtis, had actually visited the Protectorates. Perham disputed the whole basis of Curtis's thesis, arguing that there had been a "steady depreciation" in South African policy since the Union, that "liberal" South Africans were opposed to transfer and that the "central fact" was the clear and reasonable "opposition of the tribes". In a telling comment on her adversary's magnanimity, she observed that Curtis

"advocates, as always, that teaching of political responsibility by trust which will strengthen the Empire with those very forces of nationalism otherwise possibly destructive. Is this liberalism to be applied only to white races?"¹

An even more devastating critique of Curtis's views was put forward by V M Macmillan, who was refused space in *The Times*; eventually Curtis brought the correspondence to a halt by declaring that he and Macmillan were "simply wasting each other's time in trying to convince one another".² It was clear that Curtis had lost the argument, and he was reduced to complaining about "extremists . . . writing as though South Africans had horns and tails".³ An elaboration of his and Perham's articles was published later in the year under the title *The Protectorates of South Africa*; by then, however, much of the heat had gone out of the issue.

A similar lack of success awaited the Round Tablers' hopes for South African incorporation of Southern Rhodesia. Here there were two complicating factors: first that the territory was home to a small but

¹ *The Times*, 16 May 1935. Cf Perham's previous articles on the Protectorates, *The Times*, 5 and 6 July 1934.

² Curtis to Macmillan, 30 May 1935, Curtis Papers 91, fol 268; cf Macmillan to Curtis, 16 and 19 May 1935, *ibid*, fols 251-52 and 253.

³ Curtis to Smuts, 5 June 1935, Curtis Papers 91, fols 287-90.

cohesive group of white settlers, most of whom were averse to any hint of Afrikaner domination, and secondly that a strand in official British thinking saw the existence of Southern Rhodesia as a useful lever on South Africa itself, either as a bribe or as a counterweight.'

The belief that "the ultimate destiny of [Southern Rhodesia] is to form part of the Union"² was asserted right up to the referendum of November 1922 and the assumption of power by the colony's own legislature in October 1923. (Ironically, Malcolm made the latter development possible by negotiating away the Company's claims for compensation.) Thereafter, the strength of feeling against incorporation was admitted.³ Nevertheless, South African "experience" was still held to be applicable. In 1932, for instance, the *Round Table* suggested the need for segregationism and "confining the native vote . . . to the native institutions", the Cape system being merely a relic from a "time when public worship of the franchise was at its height".⁴ As late as 1935, Curtis was writing to Smuts that his "dream" was still "the completion of the Union of South Africa", from the Cape to the Zambezi.⁵ By then, however, such a possibility was highly unlikely, not least because of the independent aspirations of white Rhodesians.

1 See M Chanock, *Unconsummated Union: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1900-45* (Manchester, 1977).

2 "South Africa: The Southern Rhodesia Commission", *RT*, March 1920, p 464.

3 See, eg, [Sir Drummond Chaplin,] "Southern Rhodesia under Responsible Government", *RT*, Sept 1926, pp 757-70.

4 "Southern Africa: The Situation in Southern Rhodesia", *RT*, Dec 1932, pp 211-26.

5 Curtis to Smuts, 5 June 1935, Curtis Papers 91, fols 287-90.

East Africa

Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Uganda aroused little interest amongst Round Tablers before the Second World War. Tanganyika was briefly a subject of concern in 1917-19, the Round Tablers being anxious first that an area of such "great importance to the future of South Africa" should be kept by the Empire, and secondly that large-scale Indian immigration should not be allowed.¹ Thereafter the Round Table showed little further interest in the territory, except (occasionally) to refer to it as evidence of the high moral purpose animating British rule in the tropics.²

Kenya raised an altogether more complicated series of problems. British opinion was vitally interested in the colony, stimulated on the one hand by the romantic frontier ideology of the settlers and their allies, and on the other by the critical analyses of Norman Leys and William McGregor Ross. During the 1920s Kenya became a testing-ground for rival interpretations of Imperial trusteeship: the "Achilles' heel" of the Empire, as Dove put it.³

The issue which first kindled the Round Table's interest in Kenya was Indian migration. The restrictions placed on Indians in the colony generated intense criticism from India itself. One correspondent asserted that such criticism was the work of "extremists, who, I believe (though it is difficult to prove), are affected by Bolshevism".⁴ The impassioned interventions of such respectable Round Table contacts as Srinivasa Sastri

¹ Feetham's memorandum, 2 Oct 1917, Lothian Papers 475, fol 1; Kerr to A Chamberlain, 28 Feb 1917 and 7 March 1917, Lothian Papers 32, fols 2-4 and 5-7.

² See, eg, Coupland's article in *The Times*, 3 Oct 1928.

³ Dove to Grigg, 30 May 1925, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002.

⁴ [A G Baker?,] from Nakuru, 6 Aug 1921, Lothian Papers 17, fols 30-39.

and Sir Malcolm Hailey gave the lie to that particular idea.'

Nevertheless, far from condemning the discrimination faced by Indians, the Round Tablers threw their weight behind it. As early as 1917, Kerr suggested that the best way of rationalising restrictions against Indians was as "the case of the Kaffir".² A *Round Table* article of June 1923 anticipated the "Devonshire Declaration" by calling for the ending of Indian immigration "in the interests of the African". It also called for "sanitary segregation" and a commitment against Indian enfranchisement.³

The full implications of the "paramount duty of trusteeship" enunciated in the 1923 White Paper were not commented on by the *Round Table*, nor, apparently, immediately grasped by its editorial Moot. Certainly Grigg, who was appointed Governor in May 1925, saw no reason why "trusteeship" could not be exercised as well by the white settlers as by officials subordinate to London.

One of the tasks which Amery entrusted to Grigg was the "closer union" of Kenya with Uganda and Tanganyika. Almost immediately Grigg asked for the Moot's help in pushing the issue. At first the Moot was enthusiastic, although Dawson was deputed to warn against the danger of seeming to lead from Britain. "Could you not get Sandford [editor of the *East African Standard*] to ventilate the subject and then have this local opinion reported here, so as to give us something to work upon?"⁴ A "secret" subcommittee of the Moot was inaugurated in order to advise and

¹ See Sastri to Grigg, 3 Sept 1921, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 999; extract from Hailey's letter, 18 July 1923, Brand Papers, box 70.

² Kerr to A Chamberlain, 7 March 1917, Lothian Papers 32, fols 5-7.

³ [Dove and Rice,] "Kenya", *RT*, June 1923, pp 507-29. See generally Robert G Gregory, *India and East Africa* (Oxford, 1971).

⁴ Dawson to Grigg, 20 Oct 1925, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002.

assist Grigg, and it was suggested that Amery appoint him High Commissioner for all three territories.¹

Once Grigg was in Kenya, the Round Tablers continued to correspond, although more fitfully than their initial arrangements suggested. The main task of advising and supporting Grigg was taken over by J H Oldham, a good friend and close ally of many of the Moot, Curtis in particular. Oldham shared Grigg's concern to prevent the emergence of a gulf between the white settlers and opinion in Britain, and to establish the framework of "closer union".² As a first step, he suggested the creation of a Research Department for East Africa, whose purpose would be to help control "the forces that are threatening in the long run to make the task of civilization in Africa impossible".³

Feetham was enlisted to head the prospective department, his political masters Hertzog and Roos appreciating "the point that for the Government of a British territory in Eastern Africa to turn to South Africa for advice . . . was . . . worthy of every encouragement".⁴ At the Moot's suggestion, Oldham wrote two articles for *The Times* in which he floated the idea, incidentally claiming that Africans would benefit less from a "transient" class of administrators than from "the continuous stimulus of the presence in their midst of a more advanced and progressive

¹ Feetham to Grigg, 5 Nov 1925, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002.

² Oldham to Grigg, 8 Sept 1925 and further correspondence, *ibid.*

³ Oldham, "Research in East Africa" [Sept 1925]; Oldham to Grigg, 28 July 1926, *ibid.* "'Research' is apt to be misleading in its suggestion and I personally always treat it merely as the most convenient label", Oldham later wrote: to Kerr, 18 Feb 1927, Lothian Papers 83, fol 58.

⁴ Feetham to Grigg, 24 May 1926, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm.

civilization".¹ The Round Tablers further arranged for Oldham to put the case for research to Amery, Tom Jones and others at an All Souls weekend.²

Grigg's hopes for an early implementation of Oldham's scheme and of "closer union" foundered on the opposition of the Governor of Tanganyika, obstructionism from within the Colonial Office, and prevarication within the Cabinet. Grigg's sympathy for the aspirations of the white settlers helped matters little, and strained his alignment with Oldham and some of the Moot. His proposals for "Imperial Policy on East Africa" alarmed Oldham by their insistence on settler self-government without adequate safeguards for native interests.³ Coupland believed that Grigg was trying to "stampede the Cabinet and get a pro-Delamere policy adopted".⁴ After "a good many deliberations"⁵, Kerr wrote an article for the *Round Table* which insisted that any East African legislature "should be so constituted as to represent from the start not only the white electorate, but also the other races" (albeit by white appointees). Moreover, attention was drawn to the "undoubted evils" which would result from the "undiluted transfer of authority to a small body of white settlers".⁶

Grigg suffered further setbacks, not the least of which was an unexpected majority of the Hilton Young Commission (including Oldham

¹ *The Times*, 9 and 10 June 1926; for the Moot, see Oldham to Grigg, 8 June 1926, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002.

² Oldham to Grigg, 15 June 1926, *ibid.*

³ Grigg, "Imperial Policy in East Africa" (Feb 1927); Oldham to Grigg, 9 March and 10 April 1927, *ibid.*

⁴ K Middlemas (ed), *Thomas Jones' Whitehall Diary, vol II* (London, 1969), p 171.

⁵ Kerr to Sir John Chancellor, 2 June 1927, Lothian Papers 227, fol 105.

⁶ [Kerr,] "The New Problem of Africa", *RT*, June 1927, pp 447-72.

himself) reporting its agreement with the 1923 "native paramountcy" doctrine.¹ The advent of a Labour Government in 1929 spelt the end of Grigg's hopes for a move either on "closer union" or on settler self-government. By now British opinion was firmly set against any concession to the settlers. Dawson reported to Grigg that he was being inundated by anti-settler "extremism".²

Grigg felt betrayed by the Round Table's lack of support for his East African policy, especially after an article of his was radically amended in order to take into account the Moot's "differences of opinion".³ In 1935 he persuaded the Moot to publish a Kenyan settler's attack on the colony's "rigid, unsympathetic and out-dated" form of government.⁴ Nevertheless, the Moot as a whole found itself unable to take any clear line on Kenya, and therefore took none. The attraction of both imperial creeds struggling for supremacy in that colony was simply too great for one or the other to be decisively abandoned.

British Migration

Early advertising for the *Round Table* assured prospective subscribers that one of the objects of the Review would be "to encourage a sound system of emigration from the Mother Country to His Majesty's Dominions

¹ Grigg thought the Commission "very badly mis-handled": Grigg to Archbishop Davidson, 18 Feb 1929, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1002.

² Dawson to Grigg, 25 March 1930, *ibid.*

³ Dove to Grigg, 5 Aug 1931, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1003.

⁴ [Lord Francis Scott,] "Kenya: The Settlers' Case" ["contributed"], *RT*, Dec 1935, pp 82-97.

oversea".¹ Quite what constituted such a "sound system" was not made explicit at the time; nor, indeed, was it to be. The superficially straightforward issue of British migration was, in fact, a minefield, involving such delicate issues as Dominion autonomy, State intervention and class relations, as well as more intractable problems of birth-rates and living standards. The Moot frequently affirmed its commitment to supporting increased British migration to the Dominions², but was seldom able to match its commitment with constructive proposals.

One problem was the younger Round Tablers' reluctance (in contrast to Milner's and Amery's eagerness) to contemplate State intervention and subsidies: they accepted the Empire Settlement Act of 1922, but believed that it represented the utmost "limit . . . [of] State action".³

An even thornier set of problems was raised by the question whether British and Dominion interests in the matter were identical. The author of a 1922 New Zealand article proposed as a general principle that "in matters that are not vital to Imperial existence and honour . . . it is the plain duty of our rulers to study our own country first". It might be true that Britain had a "surplus" population, but New Zealand's capacity to absorb immigrants was limited "to a few thousands a year".⁴ An article from Australia the same year emphasised that both farmers and industrial workers

¹ *The Round Table, Preliminary Issue*, 25 July 1910, copy in Rhodes House Library.

² See especially [Dove,] "The Migration of the Races", *RT*, March 1921 pp 241-74, and [Hodson,] "Empire Migration", *RT*, Dec 1934, pp 60-78.

³ [Kerr,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, Sept 1923, p 701. For Milner and Amery, see Stephen Constantine (ed) *Emigrants and Empire* (Manchester, 1990). Judging by the results of the 1922 Act, the Round Tablers' scepticism is understandable.

⁴ "New Zealand", *RT*, Sept 1922, pp 912-30.

viewed schemes for large-scale immigration as designed to undermine their own living standards.¹

The theme that the Dominions could not be expected to be dumping-grounds for Britain's "malcontents" continued to predominate throughout the interwar years. The problems of commodity-based economies reinforced the Dominions' reluctance to accept large numbers of immigrants. An Australian article of 1936 was fairly representative in concluding that the whole assisted migration policy had been "costly and strewn with failures"; the moral was that "the type of migrant who might fail in the United Kingdom but succeed in the Dominions is now rare".²

The deathblow to large-scale emigration schemes was dealt by a factor over which neither Dominion nor British statesmen had any control: the declining British birth-rate. A special article in 1937 estimated that Britain's population would be less than 20 million by the year 2037. "Will the Dominions be ready to take a larger share in the burden of Imperial defence? Will the United Kingdom still be able to bear the cost of maintaining the strength of an Imperial Power?" These were questions which the *Round Table* could put, but not answer.³ Nevertheless, it was clear that any hopes that Britain would be able to continue to provide a stream of migrants to the Dominions were now entirely unrealistic. Indeed, the *Round Table* now expected the stream to go into reverse.

"Interchange of population is valuable in itself,
since it invigorates the individual migrant and

¹ "Australia", *RT*, March 1922, pp 405-22.

² "Empire Migration: an Australian View", *RT*, Sept 1936, pp 737-47. For one of the "failures", see "Australia: the British Settlers in Victoria", *RT*, Dec 1933, pp 203-08.

³ [D H MacLachlan,] "The Birth-Rate and the Empire", *RT*, March 1937, pp 308-18.

brings in new blood where otherwise the stock might stagnate and decline. This consideration applies . . . equally to a movement of people from the newer countries back to Great Britain as to an opposite flow".¹

The language had changed little since 1910, but within a generation the problems of Empire migration had changed beyond all recognition.

Imperial Trade and Tariffs

Throughout the interwar period, the Round Table remained cautious on the question of tariffs and Imperial preferences. Milner and Dawson were both convinced of the need for protection, and Grigg and Hitchens were both supporters of Imperial preference (although opponents of Amery's "mixing up" the Empire in the arguments for domestic protection²). Others in the Moot (especially Brand, Curtis and Kerr) continued to believe that British interests were best served by free trade, and that trade itself was a very uncertain foundation for Imperial integration.

Some attempt to mediate between Imperial preference and free trade was again made in 1923, in an article by Kerr.

"It is very uncertain whether a protected market in Great Britain alone would be sufficient and whether the disadvantages . . . would not outweigh the advantages. But . . . would not the whole Commonwealth as a home free trade market, with some uniform measure of protection from the huge competitive agencies of the modern world, be very different?"

Kerr thus outlined a prospect which was not on the agenda of any of the political parties: "free trade within the Commonwealth" (ie, Britain and the Dominions), protected from the outside world, but with no internal

¹ [Hodson,] "Empire Migration", *RT*, Dec 1934, p 61.

² Grigg to Bailey, 24 April 1924, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1001.

tariffs.' The 1923 Conference agreed a series of preferential measures - not the "Commonwealth free trade" for which Kerr argued - but was immediately followed by the general election. The Moot expressed the hope that Labour might carry through the previous government's Conference commitments "on grounds of Imperial policy".²

Grigg, who was at this time engaged in an attempt to build a "National Liberal" caucus on a platform of Imperial preference, declared himself dissatisfied with the extent of the Round Table's conversion. He thought it would be "a splendid thing to get the Round Table concentrated once again on a definite policy to be secured within a few years". Like Chamberlain earlier, he identified Curtis, who was "always afraid of the tariff question", as the root of obstruction.³ Curtis was not the only sceptic, however. The most that a majority of the Moot would commit itself to was "a system of inter-imperial trade which would at the same time encourage primary production in the Dominions and industrial development in Great Britain": again, "Commonwealth free trade".⁴

The economic crisis which followed the Wall Street Crash produced a surge of "huddling to the flag" protectionism, as Hodson observed.⁵ The Moot was perturbed by Beaverbrook's "garden wall" scheme (and especially by

1 [Kerr,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, Sept 1923 (pp 683-711), pp 700 ff. Kerr here followed the lines agreed by the Moot: Minutes of RT meeting, 7 June 1923, RT (O) Papers.

2 Minutes of RT meeting, 19 Dec 1923, RT (O) Papers; [Kerr,] "Afterthoughts on the Imperial Conference", *RT*, March 1924, pp 225-41.

3 Grigg to Bailey, 19 Feb 1925, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 1001.

4 Dove to Horsfall, 26 June 1925, Lothian Papers 19, fols 260-64.

5 Hodson to Dove, 25 Oct 1931, Lothian Papers 259, fols 507-11.

its attempt to bring in the colonies)'. Harold Butler, who wrote a *Round Table* article on the subject, thought that "tariffs are a very two-edged tool for an exporting country".² Moreover, "from a constitutional point of view . . . the idea of economic unity is a retrograde step", implying colonial dependence and a new centralisation.³

With the Ottawa Conference approaching, the *Round Table* warned against the prospect of an "Empire still divided by high tariff walls, and ringed about by an almost unscaleable barrier": such "would be an Empire doomed to decay if not disruption". Tariffs, "far from being in themselves a national asset, are an unfortunate necessity"; any tariff arrangements would have to leave the way open for preferential agreements outside the Empire, and have as their aim "a net lowering of tariff barriers". Moreover, "the use of Imperial sentiment to manufacture commercial pacts will destroy the sentiment and leave only the pacts".⁴

Hodson believed that there would be "a great deal of disappointment" with the results of the economic Conference. The agreements which were made (some of which were "very silly") would do little to secure a worldwide reduction of tariffs, which alone would secure a real return to prosperity.⁵ The *Round Table* was marginally more optimistic, suggesting that on balance there had been a net reduction of tariffs. Nevertheless, there was a danger in subjecting the "mutual relations of the Commonwealth"

1 Dove to H Butler, 26 July 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fol 620.

2 Butler to Dove, 7 July 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fols 605-06.

3 [Butler,] "Imperial Economic Unity", *RT*, Sept 1930, pp 745-65.

4 [Hodson,] "Imperial Preference", *RT*, March 1932, pp 246-65.

5 Hodson to Dove, 5 Sept 1932, Lothian Papers 267, fols 735-39.

to expectations which could not be fulfilled.¹

Hodson's caution was justified. Writing in the *Round Table* of June 1937 he examined the figures for British trade after Ottawa, concluding that what little diversion of trade to the Empire had taken place was directly attributable to Britain's decreased purchasing power, and a consequent concentration on food and raw materials. Imperial preference was only worthwhile if it secured "the maximum freedom of trade within the Empire itself" and "a substantial liberation of trade with foreign countries". In neither respect had Ottawa been a notable success.²

The Irish Free State

Curtis remained closely involved in Irish affairs until 1924, as the Colonial Secretary's "particular Private Secretary . . . for Irish matters".³ In this capacity, he played an important part in ensuring that British constitutional procedure was observed in the enactment of a Free State Constitution.⁴ The latter contained many elements foreign to the Dominion model, as Harrison Moore pointed out in a *Round Table* article; nevertheless, its framework was unmistakably that of a Dominion rather than of a Republic.⁵

With regard to the constitutional question, Curtis's attitude was

¹ [Macdonald, based on Hodson's notes,] "Ottawa and the Trade Agreements", *RT*, Dec 1932, pp 44-63.

² [Hodson,] "Empire Trade and World Trade", *RT*, June 1937, pp 514-17.

³ Grigg to L Christie, 30 April 1922, Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 999.

⁴ See John McColgan, "Implementing the 1921 Treaty: Lionel Curtis and Constitutional Procedure", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol 20 (1977), pp 312-33.

⁵ [Moore,] "Ireland: an Australian Impression", *RT*, Sept 1923, pp 782-804.

largely unhelpful to the Free State Government. On other questions he tended to be more conciliatory, hoping that fair treatment by Britain would lead to "some new political synthesis".¹ Writing to Bailey in January 1922, he asserted that "ninety per cent" of Irishmen were "potentially sane", and only ten per cent "incurably mad".²

With the outbreak of civil war in Ireland the Moot, unsurprisingly, threw what weight it had solidly behind the pro-Treaty forces. The *Round Table* poured scorn on the rebels as a small knot of "irresponsible zealots" who backed up their "new theory of divine right with the rifle and revolver".³ From his position inside the Colonial Office, Curtis pressed for financial and material support for Cosgrave's government.⁴

Many on the right wing of British politics - including erstwhile allies of the Moot such as Lords Selborne and Salisbury - professed to see in the fact of civil war proof of the Irish people's unfitness for self-government.⁵ Curtis suspected ulterior designs for the reassertion of British control over southern Ireland, a prospect which he viewed with dismay.⁶ He urged the British Government to be scrupulous in carrying out its own undertakings, especially as those who constituted the Free State

¹ Curtis to Devonshire, 11 Dec 1922, quoted in Paul Canning, *British Policy Towards Ireland, 1921-41* (Oxford, 1985), p 73. See generally pp 70-91.

² Curtis to Bailey, 7 Jan 1922, Curtis Papers 89, fols 69-70.

³ [Dove and Curtis,] "Ireland at the Cross-Roads", *RT*, June 1922, p 507.

⁴ Keith Middlemas (ed), *Thomas Jones' Whitehall Diary: Vol III: Ireland, 1918-25* (London, 1971), pp 218-19.

⁵ J J Lee, *Ireland, 1912-85* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 143-44.

⁶ Middlemas, *op cit*, pp 200-01, 220; [Curtis,] "The Irish Boundary Question", *RT*, Dec 1924, pp 35-37.

Government had "risked their own lives" for the Treaty, and had "kept it in the letter and in the spirit".¹ A breakdown of the Treaty, he asserted, would mean "certain war", and one "which cannot be terminated by another Treaty because no one in Ireland will ever trust us again".²

The test of Britain's willingness to abide by the spirit of the Treaty came in 1924, when the Free State Government requested the implementation of Article XII, which provided for a three-man Boundary Commission to modify the border between North and South. Initially Curtis feared the revival of old antagonisms, and hoped that "the basis of a settlement will be found in our securing a promise of inaction" in return for British inaction on financial claims.³ Nevertheless, the Free State Government could hardly afford to give up its one major bargaining-counter at such an early stage.

Curtis's influence was now sufficient to secure the appointment of Feetham ("the ablest of Dominion judges" and "constitutionally of conservative temperament") as Chairman, in May 1924.⁴ Problems arose when Craig refused to appoint a Northern Ireland Commissioner. Horne, Curzon and others urged support for this latest example of Ulster intractability. Eventually, with strong support from the *Round Table* - which claimed that "the honour of the [British] nation" was at stake⁵ - the British

1 Curtis to Churchill, 19 Aug 1924, Curtis Papers 89, fols 76-83.

2 Curtis to Churchill, 31 Aug 1924, *ibid.*, fols 84-87.

3 Middlemas, *op cit.*, p 228 (31 March 1924).

4 Middlemas, *op cit.*, p 232 (27 May 1924); Curtis to Churchill, 19 Aug 1924, Curtis Papers 89, fols 76-83.

5 [Dove,] "The Irish Boundary Question", *RT*, Sept 1924, p 776. Dove's article was based on Curtis's notes: see Curtis Papers 90, fols 10-23 [summer 1924].

Government rushed through legislation enabling it to appoint J R Fisher. Further problems arose over the interpretation of the Boundary Commission's terms of reference. On this issue, the *Round Table* steered a middle path, insisting that the Boundary Commission should itself be the judge of its own powers.¹

As Chairman of a Commission whose two other members were certain to differ, Feetham possessed an unusual freedom. Nevertheless, the "conservative temperament" to which Curtis referred ensured that he took a very limited view of the Commission's mandate, placing great emphasis on "economic and geographic" constraints and on the wishes of (Protestant) landlords as opposed to (Catholic) tenants. As a result, the Commission's proposals amounted to little more than a rationalisation of the existing boundary.² Leaks of the Commission's findings created outrage in the Free State, stalled the Commission's work, and paved the way for a tripartite agreement to drop all claims (except land annuities). The *Round Table* reported these events with equanimity, confining its comments to the hopeful observation that an agreement reached by all parties would prove more lasting than one imposed by a Commission, however fair and impartial.³

At the time of the wrangle over the appointment of the Commission, Churchill reported to Curtis a "growing belief" among Conservatives "that with Ulster strongly fortified and Southern Ireland a recognised

1 [Curtis,] "The Irish Boundary Question", *RT*, Dec 1924, pp 27 ff.

2 See *Report of the Irish Boundary Commission, 1925* (Shannon, 1969), especially pp 32-68 (Feetham's Memo on Article XII) and vii - xxii (Introduction, by Geoffrey J Hand); also G J Hand, "MacNeill and the Boundary Commission", in F X Martin and F J Byrne (eds), *The Scholar Revolutionary* (Shannon, 1973).

3 [Bourdillon and Horgan,] "Ireland: the Boundary Settlement and After", *RT*, March 1926, pp 344-67.

foreign nation, we should be in a stronger position than at present".¹ This was by no means the view taken by the Moot. Curtis had hoped to "use the agency of Ulster" to secure a moderate settlement for the whole of Ireland. In the June 1922 *Round Table* he again argued that the separation of Ulster exacerbated Britain's problems by increasing the relative preponderance of "extremists" in the rest of Ireland, and by furnishing them with new sources of grievance against the "Imperial factor".² Nevertheless, Ulster's resistance to incorporation was clearly strengthened by the very fact which made it such an urgent desideratum for the *Round Table*: the resurgence of Republicanism.

In the aftermath of civil war, the magazine allowed its readers to assume the gradual extinction of Republicanism in Ireland. "The real truth, always disguised and never frankly admitted, is that the great majority of the Irish people never wanted a republic."³ The rise of de Valera's Fianna Fáil party was thus something for which *Round Table* readers were not well-prepared. The magazine's Irish correspondent J J Horgan lost few opportunities to denigrate de Valera's character and political ability. He also emphasised that, with the changes in Dominion status brought about since 1921, Ireland enjoyed "all the advantages and none of the disadvantages of a republic".⁴

Fianna Fáil's electoral victory of 1932 naturally alarmed the *Round Table*. The Moot took the now unusual step of printing its own

¹ Churchill to Curtis, 8 Sept 1924, Curtis Papers 89, fols 89-90.

² [Dove and Curtis,] "Ireland at the Cross-Roads", *RT*, June 1922, pp 524-25.

³ "The Irish Scene 1925", *RT*, Sept 1925, p 753.

⁴ [Horgan,] "Events in the Free State", *RT*, March 1930, p 368.

observations on developments in Ireland, stating categorically that de Valera's constitutional intentions were "legally impossible", and that Britain's case on land annuities was "beyond dispute". If de Valera carried out his promise to abolish the oath, Britain should retaliate, by cancelling preferences for Irish goods, and refusing to negotiate further agreements at the Ottawa conference. Meanwhile, Horgan emphasised the importance of Britain taking a stand, in order to undermine de Valera's popular support.¹

Horgan initially expected Fianna Fáil's imminent demise, but the Free State elections of early 1933 marked something of a turning-point. By the end of the same year, he was describing the (short-lived) coalescence of opposition groups as having merely "saved [them] . . . from individual destruction".² Horgan now adopted a more conciliatory line towards de Valera, drawing distinctions between his views and those of Mary MacSwiney and the IRA, and welcoming his disavowal of the use of force to end partition.³ Horgan also moved closer to de Valera in his assessment of North-South relations, calling on Ulster's leadership to show "sufficient imagination and courage to face and decide this momentous issue".⁴ In December 1934 and March 1935 the Round Table tackled the Ulster question

¹ [Dove and Horgan,] "Ireland and the Treaty", *RT*, June 1932, pp 489-518, including "Editorial Preface", pp 489-92, and Appendix, "The Economic Position", pp 517-18 (showing Ireland's dependence on British markets).

² [Horgan,] "Mr de Valera's Objective", *RT*, Dec 1933, p 172.

³ [Horgan,] "The Irish Free State: Quo Vadis?", *RT*, March 1934, pp 368 ff.

⁴ [Horgan,] "The Victory of Mr de Valera", *RT*, March 1933, p 306.

head-on, with the publication of articles from Horgan and Arthur Black (a member of Stormont), putting the case for and against reunification.¹

On the central issue of Anglo-Irish relations, Horgan urged the British Government to underline the Dominions' equality by giving an assurance that force would not be used to prevent secession. This

"would immediately clear the air and free Mr de Valera's Government either to declare a republic . . . or to confess that they did not intend to do so In either event . . . such a pronouncement would remove once and for all the Irish belief that Ireland is under external compulsion in the matter".²

The Moot was divided over whether Britain should issue such an assurance.³ Nevertheless, the *Round Table* accepted de Valera's successive amendments to the constitution, no doubt convinced (as Horgan now repeatedly emphasised) that the alternative to de Valera was an Irish government even more "extreme". De Valera's seizure of the Abdication Crisis as the moment to remove the last vestiges of British suzerainty Horgan described as a gesture "of little importance": "a bit of comparatively harmless make-believe", after which "everything remains much as it was before".⁴ That the Moot acquiesced in Horgan's assessment may be inferred from Kenneth Bailey's article of June 1937, which asserted that "nobody in the rest of the Commonwealth would wish to insist on strict compliance with . . . constitutional forms . . . as the price of the Free State's membership of

¹ [Horgan,] "Ireland and the Commonwealth", *RT*, Dec 1934, pp 21-43, and [Black,] "Ulster and the Irish Problem", *RT*, March 1935, pp 249-65. The Moot itself did not take a line one way or the other.

² [Horgan,] "Ireland and the Commonwealth", *RT*, Dec 1934, pp 38-39.

³ Minutes of RT meeting, 11 April 1935, RT (O) Papers.

⁴ [Horgan,] "The Irish Republican Kingdom", *RT*, March 1937, p 355; [Horgan,] "Re-enter Ireland", *RT*, March 1938, pp 312-13.

this free association of equal nations".¹

Despite some hesitation, the Round Table, like the British Government, generally pursued a policy of "appeasement" towards Ireland between the wars.² This reflected a pragmatic appraisal of the options available. On the one hand, Britain lacked the physical and especially moral force to impose its own terms on Ireland; on the other, Britain's real interests were more likely to be secured by compromise than by confrontation. Neville Chamberlain's decision to pursue the path of negotiation, despite virulent criticism from the right of his party, was applauded by the *Round Table*. The resulting Agreement of April 1938 was welcomed as closing "a humiliating chapter in the history of Anglo-Irish relations".³

Dominion Status and Imperial Co-operation

As has been seen, the Round Tablers continued to believe that Imperial federation afforded the only permanent basis for the continuation of the Empire. They did not see their attempts at orchestrating a campaign in 1910-17 as a last-ditch effort to keep the Empire united. On the contrary, they continued to believe that federation was the ideal towards which the Empire was progressing. The Empire was like southern Africa in 1902-10, its component parts jealous of their own autonomy, and only slowly groping towards some realisation of the need for institutionalised unity.⁴

1 [K Bailey,] "The King and His Peoples", *RT*, June 1937, p 480.

2 Paul Canning, *op cit*, p ix and *passim*.

3 [Horgan,] "The Anglo-Irish Agreement", *RT*, June 1938, pp 526-27.

4 Kerr to Curtis, 21 July 1917, Lothian Papers 33, fols 19-21.

Co-operation was "unquestionably the proper line of advance for the times",¹ "the only practicable policy".² Nevertheless, it was still only an "intermediate" stage. The Round Tablers

"have always believed, and they still believe, that sooner or later, after the equality of status of the Dominions had been fully recognised, necessity and not propaganda would force a conscious movement towards constitutional unity - other than that which the Crown itself gives".³

The Round Table thus accepted, without enthusiasm, but with a keen sense of realities, the "new orthodoxy" of co-operation. Nevertheless, they were quick to point out "the essential inadequacy of our present system of Imperial relations". Taken as a whole, the actual machinery for consultation and co-operation between Britain and the Dominions was inferior to that between any of them and a foreign nation, as provided by the League. There was an "enthusiasm for form", but little of substance.⁴

Until 1921, the Round Tablers still expected the calling of a special constitutional convention, as envisaged by Resolution IX of 1917.⁵ In its absence, the main piece of co-operative machinery was still the Imperial Conference. Again contrary to the resolutions of 1917, this body quickly

¹ [Grigg,] "The British Commonwealth of Nations in 1921", *RT*, Dec 1920, p 11.

² "Draft Circular to the Dominion Groups", 22 Dec 1920, Lothian Papers 17, fol 17.

³ [Grigg,] "The British Commonwealth of Nations in 1921", p 11.

⁴ [Kerr,] "Afterthoughts on the Imperial Conference", *RT*, March 1924, pp 225-41.

⁵ [Malcolm,] "The Meeting of the Imperial Cabinet", *RT*, June 1921, pp 549 ff; cf Amery to Grigg, 24 June 1921, urging Lloyd George to set up a committee (with Milner as chairman, and himself a member) to prepare for a convention: Grigg Papers, MSS Microfilm 999.

reverted to being a biennial, triennial and finally quadrennial institution. Its value, for the Round Tablers, consequently diminished. The Conferences of 1921 and 1923 were "not far short of a failure", unwilling to "deal with the real issues which confront the Empire", and more concerned with mere "junketing and speeches".¹

The Moot put forward various proposals for improving the machinery of co-operation. Many of these were the same as the proposals put forward before the war. In 1923, for instance, Kerr suggested annual Conferences, the creation of an Imperial Secretariat, joint Anglo-Dominion delegates at all major conferences, and "quasi-diplomatic" communication between London and the Dominions by means of Agents-General and High Commissioners.² The Moot also favoured extending Dominion representation in foreign capitals: "the more direct the contact of all parts of the Commonwealth with the realities of the international world the better".³

Despite such promptings, the machinery of Imperial co-operation remained largely undeveloped. The reason, Grigg observed, was that the Dominions appeared to be concerned "rather lest they should be committed to too much unity than to too little of it".⁴

The *Round Table* recognised that the Dominions' war efforts had contributed to "a greatly and justly enhanced sense of national dignity".⁵

1 [Kerr,] "The Next Imperial Conference", *RT*, March 1926, pp 227-28.

2 [Kerr,] "The New Imperial Problem", *RT*, June 1923, pp 459-93; cf "Voyageur" [Kerr] in *The Times* 12,11,24.

3 [Kerr,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, Sept 1923, p 698.

4 [Grigg,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, Sept 1921, p 738.

5 [Grigg,] "The British Commonwealth of Nations in 1921", *RT*, Dec 1920, p 4.

Privately, Coupland described the Dominions in 1919 as "almost morbidly sensitive at present on the question of 'equal nationhood'", and he acknowledged this to be the main factor militating against the Round Tablers' hopes for closer Imperial integration.¹ Dove took a similar view. Initially, he believed that the Dominions would "settle down after the 'first wild careless rapture' which followed upon victory".² By 1926, however, he was writing of a deep-seated "inferiority complex" towards Britain, which was frustrating any attempt to institutionalise Commonwealth unity.³

There were grounds for the existence of such a "complex". As one South African commented after J H Thomas's tour of the Dominion, "if the Englishman abroad will suppress the manifestations of his assurance as a superior person, he will do more permanent good to the British Empire than all the Primrose Leagues and Empire Leagues that ever wagged a flag".⁴ Nevertheless, the Round Tablers (who were themselves always scrupulously courteous in their dealings with Dominion nationals) believed the root of the problem to lie in Dominion rather than British attitudes. Curtis wrote in 1934 of a "pathological condition" of "pique" in Dominion attitudes, which rendered it difficult for British people even to give advice to their counterparts in the Dominions.⁵

The London Round Tablers continued to believe that Dominion nationalism need not necessarily be antagonistic to Imperialism and to the

1 Coupland to Malcolm, 10 Feb 1919, RT Papers c 814, fols 148-49.

2 Dove to Coupland, 2 March 1923, Brand Papers, box 70.

3 Dove to Kerr, 16 Dec 1926, Lothian Papers 224, fols 349-56.

4 F Clarke to Dove, 18 Sept 1924, Lothian Papers 19, fols 251-54.

5 Curtis to Hodson, 20 Aug 1934, Lothian Papers 286, fol 605.

British connection, but they were forced to recognise that it frequently was. The problem was exacerbated by the extent to which nationalism was wrapped up in the internal politics of the Dominions: "twisting the lion's tail" provided an easy form of electioneering, and a mark of respectability for Dominion politicians anxious to convince their electorates that they would put the interests of their own constituents first. Such politicians, Kerr observed, made a living from "the fallacy that there is a choice between freedom and obligation".¹

The problems of co-ordinating and strengthening Anglo-Dominion relations were thus increased by changes in the politics of the Dominions themselves, and especially by the rise of a new generation of nationalist politicians. Glazebrook in 1919 thought that "it would be a very serious disaster" if Mackenzie King "should really ever become Premier of Canada"²; yet King was the dominant figure in Canadian interwar politics, clocking up a total of 22 years in office between 1921 and 1948. More worrying still was the rise of Hertzog in South Africa: the *Round Table* held him "morally responsible" for the Afrikaner rebellion of 1914, and the Moot predicted in 1920 that if he should win an election South Africa would dissolve into civil war.³ Yet Hertzog was indeed elected, and held the position of Prime Minister from 1924 to 1939. Finally, the Dominion solution to Britain's Irish problem introduced a further element of instability. Harrison Moore was initially optimistic that the Free State would "participate more fully in the conduct of affairs of the Commonwealth than other Dominions", and

¹ [Kerr,] "The New Imperial Problem", *RT*, June 1923, p 479.

² A J Glazebrook to Kerr, 4 Sept 1919, Lothian Papers 493.

³ "South Africa", *RT*, March 1915, p 467; "Draft Circular to the Dominion Groups", 22 Dec 1920, Lothian Papers 17, fols 20-21.

'lead the way" towards closer Imperial integration.' Experience proved the opposite to be the case. First Cosgrave and then de Valera led the other Dominions in unravelling their ties with Britain, so that by 1937 Eire had "a republican government in everything but name".²

Even in the case of Ireland, the Round Tablers remained optimistic concerning the real (as opposed to the stated) objectives of Dominion nationalists. They believed that as soon as the Dominions saw the hollowness of their "real power" as "small nations", the chimera of independence would lose its appeal.³ Nevertheless, there remained a deep ambivalence, and some division within the Moot, over the question of whether and in what way Britain should accommodate the nationalists' demands.

As early as 1913, Fred Perry and E J Kylie suggested pressure for formalising the autonomy of the Dominions by a declaration "that the Crown, and not the British Parliament as at present, is the bond which holds different parts of the Empire together". This suggestion, anticipating the Balfour Declaration of 1926, was not followed up, apparently because of the problematic position in which it would leave the Crown should governments offer differing advice.⁴ Nevertheless, some members of the Moot were not afraid of letting the nationalists pursue the logic of their arguments.

1 [Harrison Moore,] "Ireland: an Australian Impression", *RT*, Sept 1923, p 800.

2 [Horgan,] "The Irish Republican Kingdom", *RT*, March 1937, p 357. See here David Harkness, *The Restless Dominion* (London, 1969).

3 Coupland to Malcolm, 10 Feb 1919, *RT Papers* c 814, fols 148-49.

4 Perry to Kylie, 26 Feb 1913, *RT Papers* c 778, fols 74-76; further correspondence *ibid*, fols 38-42, 72-73, 77-78, 80-85 and c 781, fols 129-30.

Curtis went as far as suggesting, early in 1926, that the Dominions should be encouraged to declare their independence from Britain.

"First let that position be accepted, and then let each Dominion set about to settle in conference with Great Britain and with the other Dominions what in future their legal and constitutional relations are to be, and let the conclusions arrived at be embodied in documentary form Then, and not till then, shall we begin to know where we are. But, in my opinion, nothing which could issue from such a process could be more pernicious than the present situation, based as it is on no surer foundation than a shifting sand of pretence."¹

Kerr insisted that Curtis make clear he was writing in a purely individual capacity, and not on behalf of the Round Table.² In his own article anticipating the 1926 Imperial Conference, however, Kerr called on the premiers to appease the Dominions' "psychological feeling" by abolishing the last vestiges of dependence, including Britain's veto on Dominion legislation and the right of appeal to the Privy Council.³

The 1926 Conference, and the Balfour Report to which it gave rise, are often described as a landmark in Imperial relations. This was not the Round Table's view at the time. The Moot believed that the Balfour Report "defined a change that had already taken place".⁴ Commenting in the *Round Table*, Sir Frederick Whyte quoted *The Times* to the effect that that the Conference merely "provided an agreed and authoritative picture of the Empire as it is". He added that there was a "comparative scarcity of practical conclusions", mitigated only by the "psychological value of the

¹ Curtis to Hume Wrong, 15 April 1926, Lothian Papers 224, fols 321-24.

² Kerr to Dove, 29 April 1926, Lothian Papers 224, fols 327-28.

³ [Kerr,] "The Next Imperial Conference", *RT*, March 1926, pp 227-55..

⁴ Minutes of RT meeting, 5 Jan 1927, RT (O) Papers.

proceedings".¹

Dove welcomed the fact that the Report "leaves the Empire a unit for the purpose of the play of Imperial sentiment in time of crisis" - "to my mind, the reality behind the British Empire . . . is the sentiment below the surface". Nevertheless, the Report left many questions unanswered. In particular, the "difference in function" which accompanied "equality in status" was an unsatisfactory gloss on the question of responsibility.² Eggleston went further: in his view, the Balfour Report was a "dismal joke".³ Similarly, Harrison Moore, himself a member of the Conference on Dominion Legislation, was appalled by the difficulties of reconciling the irreconcilable, such as the absolute equality of legislatures with the legal unity of the Crown. The Report, he concluded, was "pure politics": deductive, doctrinaire and "hardly British".⁴ Nevertheless, he hoped that with such business out of the way, the Imperial Conference would no longer be dominated by "the mere desire of each to take back something in the way of advantage for which they can claim credit".⁵

The Moot also hoped that, with Dominion Status settled, "Dominion opinion may now begin to press in the opposite direction - for strengthening rather than loosening the Imperial structure".⁶

Nevertheless, the Imperial Conference of 1930 was again dominated by

1 [Whyte,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, March 1927, pp 225-41.

2 Dove to Kerr, 16 Dec 1926, Lothian Papers 224, fols 349-56.

3 Eggleston to Laby, 1 April 1932, Lothian Papers 267, fols 677-84.

4 Moore, "Notes on the work of the Conference on Dominion Legislation", March 1930, Lothian Papers 23, fols 629-34.

5 Moore to Dove, 19 Feb 1931, Lothian Papers 25, fols 864-66.

6 [Kerr,] "Where are We Going?", *RT*, March 1930, p 227.

questions of "freedom" rather than of "unity".

Smuts's claim, on the eve of the Conference, that no member of the "free association" could withdraw without the consent of the others created an "outrage" amongst Hertzog's Nationalist supporters. Duncan urged that the right should be conceded. If the majority in South Africa wished to secede, "they could not be prevented from doing so". More importantly,

"I do not believe that more than a handful of the Nationalist party really want to secede. But if we trail the thing in front of them and dare them to say 'secession', of course they will all say it".¹

Again, the majority of the Moot found the idea hard to stomach, and therefore rejected Duncan's views. Dove thought that talk of the Dominions' "right" to secession was like talking of Parliament's "right" to cut off Charles I's head.² The *Round Table* reflected his views. There was, Harrison Moore asserted, a "distinction between those things which may be changed as the result of discussion and those which cannot". The Dominions' allegiance to the Crown "cannot be dissolved by the unilateral act of the subject".³

There were thus limits to the Round Tablers' tolerance of the constitutional disintegration of the Empire. Nevertheless, the Moot remained optimistic, believing that the changes of 1917-31 had cleared the deadwood from Anglo-Dominion relations. Dove even asserted that the Moot

"recognised, after the war, that all this had to come We have done our best . . . to suggest improvements in machinery and otherwise, so as to render co-operation possible, but we have in no way run counter to the dominant movement which ended in the Statute of Westminster. Nor have we any regrets,

1 Duncan to Lothian, 3 June 1930, RT Papers c 813, fols 61-62.

2 Dove to Lothian, 8 Sept 1930, Lothian Papers 252, fols 643-44.

3 [Moore,] "The Crown and the Dominions", RT, Dec 1930, pp 96-105.

for we believe that nothing permanent, in the new conditions which arose after the war, could ever have been built on the old foundations".

The Empire was now "at a psychological moment". The "co-equality movement" had run its course. It was time to return to the "constructive ideal - the integration of the British Commonwealth".¹

A series of Round Table meetings over the summer and autumn of 1932 discussed various options as to the best way forward. Grigg favoured the creation of an "Empire secretariat" and of an "Empire Foreign Affairs Committee", the latter consisting of delegations from the various national parliaments, based in Geneva.² Curtis, of course, argued that federation offered the only solution to the problem, but he also suggested the creation of a deliberative assembly, modelled on the Assembly of the League, in order to foster an all-Commonwealth outlook (and reveal the limits of co-operation "inexorably").³ This latter suggestion commended itself to the Moot, and Curtis was therefore deputed to outline his proposal in a memorandum circulated to all the Round Table groups.⁴

Further suggestions were put forward in the *Round Table*: a Commonwealth tribunal, co-ordination of Commonwealth representation at Geneva, enhancement of the position of Dominion High Commissioners, interchange of civil service and military personnel, and some system of

¹ Dove to T H Laby, 5 July 1932, (Melbourne file,) RT (O) Papers.

² Grigg, "The British Empire, the League of Nations and the Rhodes Ideal", (circulated 28 Sept 1932), Lothian Papers 268, fols 753-89.

³ Curtis, "Memorandum for Discussion at Blickling", 19 Sept 1932, Lothian Papers 268, fols 742-51.

⁴ Minutes of RT meeting, 7 to 10 Oct 1932, RT (O) Papers; Curtis, Draft Memorandum (circulated for 31 Oct 1932 meeting), Lothian Papers 268, fols 811-27.

joint (or shared) diplomatic representation.' Kenneth Bailey suggested various measures for enhancing the unifying rôle of the monarch, including more extensive Royal visits to the Dominions (when the monarch could assume the duties normally carried out by a Governor-General), and the appointment of a Governor-General or equivalent for purely British matters.²

Throughout the 1930s, discussion of the machinery for Commonwealth co-operation was overshadowed by the prolonged economic, and worsening political, world crisis. Specific functional and regional co-operation looked increasingly more realistic than an "undiscriminating pursuit of uniformity".³ The *Round Table* now began to suggest that a start might be made with just some Dominions (especially Australia and New Zealand) rather than wait for the slow movers.⁴ Above all, however, the development of common machinery was subordinated to the more pressing need for common policy. As Hodson put it, "because the independence of the Dominions has been fully established, it is all the more necessary that on vital matters of common concern" the Empire "should secure the greatest possible measure of common policy".⁵

1 See in particular [Sir Alexander Wood Renton,] "A Commonwealth Tribunal", *RT*, Sept 1933, pp 742-56; [Hodson,] "British Commonwealth Relations", *RT*, Dec 1933, pp 42-61.

2 [Bailey,] "The King and his Peoples", *RT*, June 1937, pp 467-84.

3 [Hodson,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, Sept 1937, p 701.

4 [Hodson,] "British Commonwealth Relations", *RT*, March 1938, pp 275 ff.

5 [Hodson,] "The Imperial Conference", *RT*, Sept 1937, p 696.