

I

THE DOCTRINE AND ITS SETTING

1. *The Battle of the Two Philosophies*

THE setting of British administrative policy was laid at the foundations of the British dominion in India. In the early period after Plassey expediency predominated. The immediate problem at that time was the manner in which the British should exercise their controlling power in the Bengal territories. At first they felt too inexperienced and unready to contemplate taking the government of the country into their own hands, and had resort to the expedient of a puppet Indian government. Even when this system broke down, and Clive obtained from the titular Mughal authority the grant of the formal right to collect the land revenue and administer civil justice (the grant of the *Diwani* in 1765), he was determined that the native administration and its officers should be continued, and the Company's power still held in the background. The result was Clive's famous 'double government'. The first point in his politics, as he told the Bengal Council on his departure in 1765, was that the Company's sovereignty should be masked.¹ In this way as little interference as possible was to be made with the indigenous political system. The attitude persisted when the considerations of expediency which had prompted it were no longer so strong. As the indigenous system withered, the British were compelled increasingly to intervene in the revenue and judicial spheres, and to fashion administrative machinery of their own. But they continued to regard themselves as inheritors rather than innovators, as the revivers of a decayed system and not the vanguard of a new. Social conditions favoured this attitude. A handful of eighteenth-century Englishmen, scattered throughout the Bengal

¹ Clive to Verelst and Select Committee, 16 Jan. 1767: *Second Report on East India Company, 1772*; also Clive to Court of Directors, 30 Sept. 1765, *Third Report on East India Company, 1773*.

territories, without English wives, or prospects of furlough, and with no rigid moral or religious code, soon adapted themselves to Indian ways of living. Set on making their fortune before the climate or disease carried them off, they were zealots for no cause or political principle, and were content to conduct the public business according to its traditional Indian forms and in the traditional hybrid Persian. Yet their very presence betokened a change in the character of government, however long its effects might be delayed. The breach had been made, and the pressure of the Directors for patronage steadily widened it until the English element in the government of Bengal predominated. Although a product of circumstance rather than design, the principle of anglicization had taken root. Warren Hastings attempted to resist its implications. He was the first to recognize the necessity of abandoning the sham of Clive's 'double government' and openly to assert British sovereignty and responsibility. Yet he feared not only the immediate effects of releasing a horde of plundering English officials into the interior, but also the more lasting consequences of loosening English ideas and methods on the weakened fabric of Indian society. He tried, unsuccessfully as it proved, to confine the British element in the administration to the Supreme Government at Calcutta, and to leave the ordinary provincial administration in the hands of the old Indian official class.

The first conscious movement to introduce English principles into the British possessions arose out of the attempt of Parliament to control the excesses of the Company's servants in India. Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773 instituted the Calcutta Supreme Court, 'the chief purpose of which', in Burke's words, 'was to form a strong and solid security for the natives against the wrongs and oppressions of British subjects resident in Bengal'.¹ The Supreme Court was made independent of the Governor-General and Council, and administered English law. With its powers of jurisdiction defined in only the vaguest manner it was possible for the Court by legal construction to extend

¹ *Ninth Report of Select Committee on the Affairs of India, 1783*; Burke, *Works*, 1852 edn., vol. vi, p. 384.

its authority over the larger part of the civil justice administered in the Bengal territories. The threat that English law would displace the indigenous Hindu and Muslim system aroused in Hastings the first conscious reaction in favour of preserving Indian society and its institutions against the anglicizing danger. For the first time such an attitude did not rest upon reasons of expediency but was grounded on an emotional prejudice. As he protested, 'the people of this country do not require our aid to furnish them with a rule for their conduct, or a standard for their property'. Hastings's encouragement of oriental scholarship and, in particular, of Halhed's translation of Hindu laws was part of this attitude. When he interfered to reorganize the whole judicial system, he claimed that 'no essential change was made in the ancient constitution of the province. It was only brought back to its original principles'.¹ Thus while Clive's 'double government' was abandoned and all effective administrative authority taken into English hands, the dual principle remained. Hastings refused to recognize the legal fiction of the grant of the *Diwani* as giving the Company any power or right it did not already possess; but undoubtedly the conception of the dual origin of the Company's authority, the grant from the Crown and the grant from the Mughal emperor, continued to colour English thinking. As the legate of Mughal rule the Company was regarded as bound to respect the religion and habits of the people and to preserve to them their special laws.

The second wave in the gathering tide of anglicization came with Cornwallis, the Governor-General from 1786 to 1793. But it still came in what might be called a defensive form. The institution of the Supreme Court, exercising the jurisdiction of English law over the acts of the Company's servants in their individual capacity, had failed to extinguish open abuse and corruption. Cornwallis's outlook still moved in accordance with the motives which had inspired its establishment. He inherited the belief that the Company's financial difficulties and the troubles and miseries besetting the Company's territories sprang from the failure to control

¹ Hastings to Lord Mansfield, 25 Aug. 1774: G. R. Gleig, *Life of Warren Hastings*, vol. i, p. 401.

its own European servants; and he proposed to subject them not merely as individuals but as a system of government to the rule of English constitutional principles. Despite Francis's urging, there was now no question, even if Cornwallis had wished, of a return to the indigenous system under Indian officials; but in any case it was oriental principles of government which in Cornwallis's eyes were fundamentally at fault. He saw in the Company's adoption of Asian despotism the source of every ill. To him the essence of the problem was to limit governmental power and so prevent its abuse. Thus while he confirmed and extended the English administration, taking over criminal justice from the control of the Nawab and firmly establishing the system of district administration, he was all the time concerned to limit its power. He consciously broke with the personal, authoritarian tradition of Indian government, and based his work explicitly on the principles of the English political tradition. The authors of the *Fifth Report* of 1812 saw this point quite clearly. According to them Cornwallis had the choice of consolidating British rule on the basis of the Mughal system or of adopting an entirely new and foreign foundation. A case for attempting to preserve the Mughal institutions could be argued; it was, that

when brought back to their original state of utility, and improved by such regulations as might be superadded by the British government, [they] would, under a just and vigilant administration, unite the liberal policy of an European state with the strength and energy of an Asiatic monarchy, and altogether be better suited to the genius, experience, and understanding of the natives, than institutions founded on principles, to them wholly new, derived from a state of society with which they were unacquainted. . . .

Cornwallis's decision was, however, for

the introduction of a new order of things, which should have for its foundation, the security of individual property, and the administration of justice, criminal and civil, by rules which were to disregard all conditions of persons, and in their operation, be free of influence or control from the government itself.¹

¹ *The Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 28 July, 1812, p. 18.*

The Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793) was a frank attempt to apply the English Whig philosophy of government. It had as its central belief the Whig conviction that political power is essentially corrupting and inevitably abused; that power, to be exercised with safety, must be reduced to a minimum, and even then kept divided and counterbalanced. Cornwallis sought to reduce the function of government to the bare task of ensuring the security of person and property. He believed this could be achieved by permanently limiting the State revenue demand on the land; for he was convinced that the executive arm of the Government would always abuse its power so long as the State demand was variable from year to year.¹ Once the settlement was fixed in perpetuity, the Boards of Revenue and the collectors could be deprived of all judicial powers, and their functions confined 'to the mere collection of the public dues'.² The executive would thus be divested of all discretionary authority, and would be subject to the rule of law as framed into formal legislative enactments by the Supreme Government and enforced by a judiciary entirely independent of the ordinary executive authorities. The permanent limitation of the revenue demand, and the curbing of executive power which it made possible, were not, however, the most decisive feature of the Permanent Settlement. This was rather the determination to introduce private property rights in land and uphold them through a Western type of law system. Cornwallis believed that everything hinged upon the recognition of the proprietary rights of the *zemindars*, the great landholders; and indeed landed property is the kernel of the Whig conception of political society. To the Whig mind landed property appeared as the agency which affected the reconciliation of freedom with order. Itself almost a part of the law of nature, there flowed from a system of landed property a natural ordering of society into ranks and classes, 'nowhere more necessary than in this country', maintained Cornwallis, 'for preserving order in civil society'.³ In the

¹ Minute of Cornwallis, 10 Feb. 1790: G. W. Forrest, *Selections from the State Papers of the Governors-General of India: Lord Cornwallis*, vol. ii, p. 113.

² Despatch to Court of Directors, 6 March 1793: Forrest, *Cornwallis*, vol. ii, p. 124.

³ Despatch to Court of Directors, 2 Aug. 1789: *Correspondence of Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross, vol. i, p. 554.

Whig outlook society was thus naturally self-ordered without the direct interference of government. So far from meaning the exercise of arbitrary or discretionary authority, the true function of government was simply the administration of justice. Its task was no more than the impartial administration of fixed and equal laws for the maintenance of private property rights. Once these latter were secured, all else followed. Political authority, in the form of the subjection of one man to the will of another, was reduced to its lowest point; and the happy marriage of liberty and security provided the most favourable conditions for the production of wealth. Throughout Cornwallis's Minutes there resound unconscious echoes of Locke's classic statement of the Whig theory. He sought to give concrete form to the rule of law in the Bengal Code of Regulations of 1793, and the preamble to Regulation II stated the general principle:

Government must divest itself of the power of infringing, in its executive capacity, the rights and privileges, which, as exercising the legislative authority, it has conferred on the landholders. The revenue officers must be deprived of their judicial powers. All financial claims of the public when disputed under the regulations, must be subjected to the cognisance of the courts of judicature, superintended by judges, who from their official situations, and the nature of their trusts, shall not only be wholly uninterested in the results of their decisions, but bound to decide impartially between the public and the proprietors of land, and also between the latter and their tenants. The collectors of the revenue must not only be divested of the power of deciding upon their own acts, but rendered amenable for them to the courts of judicature; and collect the public dues, subject to a personal prosecution for every exaction exceeding the amount which they are authorized to demand on behalf of the public, and for every deviation from the regulations prescribed for the collection of it. No power will then exist in the country by which the rights vested in the landholders by the regulations can be infringed or the value of landed property affected. Land must in consequence become the most desirable of all property; and the industry of the people will be directed to these improvements in agriculture which are as essential to their own welfare as to the prosperity of the state.

In this spirit Cornwallis carried through a sweeping anglicization of the British power, removing Indians from all but the petty offices, and taking away from the great

Bengal landholders their last quasi-political power, the right to keep armed retainers and to police their districts. He sought by his reforms to erect an impersonal government of law, 'a system upheld by its inherent principles, and not by the men who are to have the occasional conduct of it'; and he resorted to the classic Whig division of the powers, with its separation of the judiciary and executive. In each district of the Bengal territory a Collector was established, who was designed to be merely what his name implied, not an all-powerful discretionary official, but a mere collector of fixed public dues. He was given no political or magisterial authority, and was not even entrusted with the control of the district police. The great figure in the district, the true representative of the British system, was meant to be the District Judge and Magistrate; it was he who was empowered to administer the impersonal law system of the Cornwallis Code of Regulations, even, if need be, against the collector himself in his official capacity. The district judge was given the control of the police, and a status and salary superior to that of the collector.

Wellesley, the next important figure among the Governor-Generals (1798-1805), saw and admired these English principles. He asserted that the British constitution had supplied the model of Cornwallis's work, and believed he was carrying this work to its proper completion by divesting the Governor-General's Council of its function as the high court of the Company's judicial system, and instituting instead a separate Court of *Sadr Diwani* and *Nizamat Adalat*.

The early administration of the Company succeeded to the despotic power of the native princes. Those princes, as in other despotic governments, united in their own persons, the whole legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the State, and exercised them according to the dictates of their own discretion. No form of Government could be so ill-adapted to these countries when they became dependent possessions of the British Empire, subject to be governed by persons occasionally deputed from the Mother Country. Experience of the evils attendant on this form of Government conducted by a delegated British administration, led to the modelling of the Government of Bengal, on principles drawn from the British constitution. A distribution of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of the state, analogous to that which

forms the basis of the British constitution was made the foundation of the new constitution of the Government of Bengal.

In his enthusiasm for these constitutional principles and his anxiety to see them adopted in the Madras territories, Wellesley maintained that the question of a permanent settlement of the land revenue was altogether separate, and formed no necessary part of the 'fundamental principle of the new constitution'. Even at this time, when a marked improvement in the quality and probity of the British official was noticeable, Wellesley still defended the abandonment of the native tradition and the separation of the judicial from the executive authorities by the Whig argument that all power was inherently liable to abuse.¹

Although based on frankly English principles and on a conscious abandonment of what was held to be native tradition, the movement of anglicization was still defensive in outlook. It was not designed to effect a wholesale revolution of Indian society; its purpose was rather to limit the interference of government. Wellesley still mirrors this outlook, claiming as he did, that the indigenous form and institutions of government were no essential part of Indian society. In fact, he declared, the British system of public law, administered by an independent judiciary, was the best guarantee of toleration and protection for those interests to which the great mass of the people were truly attached. For these interests embraced no system of political principles or form of government, but consisted of the religion of the people, their ancient customs, and the pursuit of their domestic concerns. The 'new constitution' pivoted, however, on the definition and enforcement of private property rights in the Western sense; and whatever the original intention, this was to prove an innovation that ultimately was to play the most decisive role in the overthrow and transformation of the old society.

The resistance to this policy of applying British constitutional principles to the Indian administration came some-

¹ Letter of Governor-General in Council to Madras, 19 July 1804, para. 25. Wellesley was sufficiently proud of this despatch to have it published in London in 1812 (see India Office Library Tracts, vol. 465).

what surprisingly from the brilliant group of subordinates which served Wellesley: from Munro, Malcolm, Elphinstone, and Metcalfe.¹ Out of their thought and work emerged a new and conscious alternative to an anglicized form of administration. They deserve a close study because they were the dominant school in the formation of Indian policy when liberalism first began to exercise an influence on internal administration after 1818. Despite a disparity of age and temperament, there is a unity of thought in this knot of men which makes it possible to speak of them as the founders of a political tradition. Their great work was in various forms to counter the spirit of the Cornwallis system. Although most of them spent the main part of their careers in military and diplomatic activities, their concrete and visible achievement was the *ryotwar* system of land settlement and general administration, first developed by Munro, and extended by him throughout the Madras Presidency in the period of his governorship from 1819 until 1827. Mountstuart Elphinstone, who was rewarded in 1819 for his diplomatic achievements against the Mahrattas with the governorship of the Bombay Presidency, adopted the *ryotwar* system for the large area of western India that was annexed to the Bombay Presidency as a result of the Mahratta defeat; and his work was maintained by his successor, John Malcolm, Governor from 1827 until 1830. In the north, Metcalfe, the youngest and the last to leave India, threw all the weight of his influence (as Resident of the Delhi Territory and later as member of the Governor-General's Council) against the extension of the Cornwallis system to the Ceded and Conquered (afterwards North-Western) Provinces. He lived to see the 'village communities' there made the basis of the revenue settlement, and the executive and magisterial functions permanently reunited in the person of the collector.

Except for Munro, these men owed their early advancement to Wellesley, to whom they had also been attracted imaginatively by the scale of his imperial vision. Wellesley had brought to India a mind and ambition inflamed with the world-struggle for empire against Napoleonic France. He deliberately set out, as none of his predecessors had

¹ See Biographical Notes, pp. 331-2.

deemed practicable or desirable, to reduce the whole Indian peninsula to subjection to the British power, and he poured open scorn on the narrow counting-house mentality of the Court of Directors and their anxiety over the financial unprofitability of such a dominion. His *grande manière*, his majestic conception of Indian affairs, fired the enthusiasm of his subordinates, to whom he was always the 'glorious little man'. All of them were kindled with his imperialist ambition—to raise up, as Malcolm said, 'a monument of glory' in the form of a great eastern empire. Their constant awareness of the historical significance of their work gives to all their writing a largeness of outlook and a certain majesty of statement, never again to be recaptured in British Indian annals. From the glimpses which the records of their private thoughts permit, they possessed what might be termed the Romantic temperament; combining a strong introspective bent, a sensibility for natural beauty and for historical associations, with an imaginative urge for release in action and adventure. Charles Metcalfe, even as a youth, was the morose and solitary being he was to remain throughout his life. His early journal records a fervent belief in the heroic nature of politics, 'the most noble of professions', and his faith in the superiority of 'active talents' over expert scientific knowledge contrasts strongly with the cult of expertise and administrative technique which tended to set in after 1818.¹ This superior comprehensiveness of outlook, which Metcalfe as a young man was seeking, is evident in the other figures. It is true that Munro was able to combine such an outlook with an expert and detailed knowledge of revenue affairs, and that Malcolm insisted upon a thorough knowledge of details as the only basis for a true grasp of the art of Indian administration. But in his final advice to his assistants in central India, it was this catholicity of attitude to which Malcolm returned. Nothing could keep them right in detailed questions of policy, he said, but accustoming their minds to dwell upon the character of British power in India, and that of the empire over which it was established.² The width

¹ J. W. Kaye, *Life of Metcalfe*, vol. i, p. 88.

² Sir John Malcolm, *The Political History of India*, 2nd edn., 1826, vol. ii, p. 159. *Id.*, *Memoir of Central India*, vol. ii, p. 474.

of vision which these men exhibit, and the heroic manner in which they regarded political activity, is a reflection of the great Napoleonic struggle in Europe, and of that conscious sense of fashioning history which prevailed in the Romantic age.

Malcolm had little of a brooding, melancholic nature, but his aim at self-completeness is characteristic of his world. That impulse for completion, which made every great Romantic poet a politician, worked in him to transform the roughly educated soldier into a finished statesman and writer. For a busy man of affairs his literary achievement was remarkable; it included his *History of Persia* (still regarded as a standard work), *The Political History of India*, *Central India*, *The Government of India*, the *Life of Clive* (upon which Macaulay wrote his famous *Edinburgh Review* article), as well as various occasional verse. With Munro there was the same intellectual eagerness, continuing far into life and prompting him at the age of sixty to go painstakingly through Ricardo.¹ Of this group Mountstuart Elphinstone was the scholar-statesman *par excellence*. Taking a text from *Cymbeline* as his motto:

What pleasure, sir, find we in life, to lock
it from action and adventure?

he wedded the life of court, camp, and chase, with a passion for intellectual pursuits—for the Latin, Greek, and Persian classics, and for history, philosophy, and jurisprudence. The laconic entry in his diary after the storming of Gawilgarh during the Assaye campaign indicates his ideal: 'I breakfasted with Kennedy and talked about Hafiz, Saadi, Horace, and Anacreon. At nine I left him and went to the trenches.' But the Byronic melancholia, to which his acute sensibility was subject, and the introspectiveness, so unusual in a man of action, link him clearly with the Romantic temperament. Elphinstone would have scorned such a thought as affectation, and on this ground he reserved his judgement on the Lake poets, though reading Byron avidly. He had, however, all the Romantics' worship of nature; there is no mistaking

¹ For an account of Munro's intellectual pursuits, cf. Gleig, *Munro*, vol. i, p. 9. Cf. vol. ii, pp. 282-305, for his notes on Ricardo's *Political Economy*.

its note in his description of the falls of Gokauk by moonlight, when he 'felt as in the presence of a superior being and was filled with a reverential and almost superstitious awe'.¹

Metcalf also shared this feeling for Nature,² and it was also to be found in the more rough-hewn and simpler character of Munro, who had few of the trappings of the eighteenth-century cultivated gentleman. Elphinstone was himself surprised at the poetic sensibility which Munro hid beneath his bluff soldier's exterior.³ Indeed, in Munro we come nearer to the elemental emotion which Wordsworth experienced in the face of Nature. In a letter to his sister, he wrote:

I spend many of my leisure hours on the highest summit of the rock on which the fort stands, under the shady bastion, built by Hyder. The spot has for me a certain charm, which I always strongly feel, but cannot easily describe. . . . While seated on the rock, I am, or fancy that I am more thoughtful than when below. The extent and grandeur of the scene raises my mind, and the solitude and silence make me think that 'I am conversing with Nature here'. To the east, I see a romantic, well-cultivated valley, leading to the wide plains of the Carnatic. To the south, a continuation of the same valley, running as far as the eye can reach, into Mysore. All the rest, on every side, is a vast assemblage of hills and naked rocks, wildly heaped one above the other.⁴

It was these wild and desolate scenes of Nature which he believed to be 'sublimier subjects of poetry than all the fictions of Greece and Rome'. There is the same insistence, as with Wordsworth, on natural simplicity, the same contempt for the artifices of civilized society, and for mere book-learning and abstract philosophy, and the same reverence for the accumulated wisdom of the past.⁵ Above all, the aura

¹ For Elphinstone's character, cf. T. E. Colebrooke, *Life of Mountstuart Elphinstone*, vol. i, pp. 166, 351-3, vol. ii, pp. 145-8.

² Cf. a passage from one of Metcalf's letters in 1827, cited Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, pp. 167-8.

³ Journal, 28 May 1820: Colebrooke, *Elphinstone*, vol. ii, p. 110.

⁴ Munro to his sister, Ambore, 1 March 1795: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. i, pp. 86-87.

⁵ Munro to his sister, 15 Sept. 1795: *ibid.*, p. 170: 'It is distressing that we should persevere in the absurd practice of stifling the young ideas of boys of fourteen or fifteen, with logic. A few pages of history give more insight into the human mind, in a more agreeable manner, than all the metaphysical volumes that ever were published.' Cf. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XIII.

of sentiment with which Wordsworth and the Romantics invested the noble peasant was fully shared by Munro; and it is not idle to see in this the emotional and mental background to the *ryotwar* system of land settlement, which is Munro's particular title to greatness.¹ To take the peasant in all his simplicity, to secure him in the possession of his land, to rule him with a paternal and simple government, and so to avoid all the artificialities of a sophisticated European form of rule—these political aims surely spring directly from that current of contemporary thought in Europe which literary historians have called the Romantic movement.

It was ironic that this group of men should attain to the fullness of power at the moment when the world of diplomatic and military action, in which their ideas were nurtured, had come to its end.² With the termination of the final Mahratta war in 1818, and the crushing of the last independent power which could oppose the British, the political problem in India was transformed. 'The task of conquest was slight', reflected Malcolm, 'in comparison with that which awaits us, the preservation of the empire acquired.'³

The age of chivalry had gone; that of sophisters, economists, and calculators was to succeed. The sword was to be exchanged for the pen, and the soldier-diplomat to give way before the administrator and judge. The change in itself meant a new temper. The large discretion permitted to individuals, in the early days of conquering and settling a country, was bound to be replaced by a more regular and centralized form of administration. In writing to Metcalf in 1821, Malcolm was referring to a fast-fading past when he said that neither of them were 'exactly at the disposal of what Captain Clutterbuck calls a clattering piece of parchment, and can halt or move as the clouds indicate'.⁴ In practice, he knew that even men in the highest position were being placed 'as much under minute check and control as a collector of a

¹ Munro to Col. Read, 16 June 1801: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. iii, p. 162.

² In 1819 Munro became Governor of Madras, and Elphinstone Governor of Bombay. In 1827 Metcalf became a member of the Supreme Council, and Malcolm succeeded Elphinstone as Governor of Bombay.

³ Malcolm, *Political History*, vol. ii, p. 64.

⁴ Malcolm to Metcalf, April 1821: Kaye, *Malcolm*, vol. ii, p. 317.

small district'; and he feared that this, and the absence of stirring political events, would result in a deterioration of the Company's civil servants.¹ Although he and his companions in ideas recognized such a change, from the excitement of military and diplomatic activity to the humdrum of day-to-day administration, as a natural process in the growth of British rule, they accepted its implications with foreboding. They were aware that the new age of peace, retrenchment, and reform, would bring forth a generation of administrators, purposeful and earnest, but with ideas alien to their own. None of them, not even Munro, the oldest of them, was hostile to reform; indeed they all prided themselves on their liberal opinion. But their political instincts were traditional and sentimental. They distrusted the chilly dogmatics of the reforming spirit, which was to eradicate in the name of utility all the historical associations connected with the rise of British power; and in the cause of efficiency, simplicity, and economy, sought to reduce the historical modes of government to one centralized, uniform practice. Against the tendency that would transform British rule from a personal, paternal government, to an impersonal, mechanical administration, they took their stand.

In the history of British India they are the true conservative element; but the term needs definition. It is not to be confused with a desire to return to the pre-Cornwallis era, to the ambiguities and deceits of 'dual rule', and the tradition of the nabobs. The men whom we are discussing were far removed in outlook from that world whose traces had until recently survived at the Residencies in the native states, where a Kirkpatrick at Hyderabad, a 'King' Collins at Ujjain, or an Ochterlony at Delhi, had lately reigned with their harems and fabulous retinues of elephants and guns. That reform of morals by which Burke sought to sanctify public life, and the Evangelicals to purify private and social life, had left its mark in the austerity of their lives and their commanding sense of public duty. Nor is their tradition to be confused with that of Cornwallis, the inherent passivity of which had grown with its ageing. Mere *vis inertiae*, mere partiality for the existing order, is not properly conservatism;

¹ Malcolm, *Political History*, vol. ii, p. 82.

and it was, indeed, against the Cornwallis system that these men spent their lives contending.

It is true that by 1810 the Bengal system had established itself as the orthodox pattern of British rule, and was already loaded with the dead weight of a tradition. The efforts of Munro and his contemporaries to upset this system were therefore often regarded as innovation, when in fact, as Malcolm insisted, it was theirs that was the true conservative attitude.¹ The outlook of Munro, Malcolm, Metcalfe, and Elphinstone towards the Cornwallis school is of particular importance, because it blends almost imperceptibly into their attitude to the movement of reform, which gathered pace in the eighteen-twenties.

As the 'Romantic' generation in British-Indian history, they revolted against what they considered to be the cold, lifeless, mechanical principles informing the Cornwallis system,² its *a priori*, unhistorical attitude, which would impose English ideas and institutions on Indian society, and its facile optimism in the virtue of human nature when left untrammelled by government. They could not renounce the entire philosophy of the Cornwallis system, because in the end it represented the permanent English political instinct; but they sought to modify that philosophy in the manner in which Burke had redeemed whiggism from its superficiality and crudeness. They brought to the Indian problem Burke's notion of history, that conception which regards human society as a continuous community of the past, present, and future. The Bengal system they saw as the denial of this touchstone of history and experience; it was the ignorant application of *a priori* political ideas without regard to the history and circumstances of Indian society. It rested on the fallacy that a political society could be constructed anew, on the basis of abstract principles wrung from an alien tradition. They did not deny the theoretic virtue of the rule of law and division of the powers, but they denied that these could be introduced unmodified into India.

¹ Malcolm to Wynne (President of Board of Control), 19 April 1828: Bentinck MSS.: '... to hear them speak of changes *we have introduced within the last ten years* you would suppose that an effort to revert to usages sanctioned by as many centuries evinced a spirit of innovation! !'

² Cf. Sir John Malcolm, *Government of India*, Appendix, p. 21.

There was a deeper emotional objection, going beyond mere considerations of political expedience. They shared neither the Whig enthusiasm for the original virtue of man in a state of nature, nor its pessimism as to the exercise of political power. They had no hopes of sudden and miraculous changes in the progress of human society, and there lingered in their thinking, particularly in Munro's, something of that older tradition, which saw the division of society into rulers and ruled as a natural ordering, and which envisaged submission to authority as necessary to the anarchic nature of man. Power to them was not a delegation of natural rights from the people, but rather a trust imposed by an inscrutable Providence.

There were, of course, important differences of opinion among this group, but in broad terms these general features marked the attitude of them all. The sharpest difference was between Malcolm and Metcalfe over the policy towards the Indian states and the old aristocracy. Malcolm, with the others, had no illusion that British rule could ever rest on the affection of the people; its security depended on the impression of its invincibility.¹ But he believed that it was politic and right to try to conciliate the displaced aristocracy by generous treatment; to cushion the impact of a foreign dominion by an attempt to preserve something of the methods and institutions of Indian society; and to palliate the undesirable effects of direct rule at the hands of a foreign race by encouraging the survival of the Indian states.² Metcalfe, on the contrary, was pessimistic about the feasibility of conciliating the old ruling classes. He believed that, within certain rigidly defined external frontiers, the soundest policy was to use every just occasion to annex native states, and to resume pensions and revenue alienations made to privileged classes before the British conquest. The revenue

¹ Malcolm, *Government of India*, Appendix, p. 157.

² Cf. Malcolm to Wynne, (Copy) 19 April 1828: Bentinck MSS.: 'With respect to raising natives both in the fiscal and judicial line, I am of the same sentiments as Sir Thomas Munro. I desire not only to maintain Princes and Chiefs, whom we find existing over the lands ruled by their forefathers and to encourage cultivators to become proprietors, but I desire to share the Aristocracy of Office with the natives of India. There may be some hazard in their admission but there is much more in their exclusion. . . .

thus acquired would make provision for an invincible armed force, instead of being dissipated by faint Indian rulers, whose loyalty must always be doubtful.¹ He had no sympathy with Malcolm's fear that, once the British had absorbed the whole of India under their direct rule, turbulence would be denied its natural outlets, and all discontent would gather to a single head against the British power.

Malcolm's compassion for fallen greatness is immediately reminiscent of, if not inspired by, Burke. Metcalfe had spurned as a contemptible sham the perpetuation of the Mughal emperor's suzerainty; for he believed that power could not be shirked, and must be made to stand forth openly and unequivocally. Malcolm, however, thought that the arrangement:

. . . had its root in a wise conformance to usage, in a generous consideration of the feelings of fallen greatness. It was the veneration of a great power that had passed away; and the superstition that continued to give homage to the shrine which we had addressed to propitiate our rise, was sanctioned by the example of the wisest among nations. There was little except goodness in it.

And then he passes to the heart of Burke's teaching, that illusion is necessary to life, that the pomp and circumstance with which men clothe political power is a vital succedaneum, 'necessary', as Burke says, 'to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature'.

Bacon has told us what shrunken things the minds of most men would be if stripped of their vanities and pretensions; but where would you leave states, if you were to knock away the thousand props, seen and unseen, by which they were supported?—many and some of the strongest of which, have their foundation in what one of your *mere* general politicians or authors would pronounce, justly enough, folly, prejudice, ignorance or absurdity.²

Despite this difference in their attitude towards the conquered ruling classes, it implies no sundering of the fundamental unity of their thought. This domestic difference was to be repeated later in the Punjab, between John and Henry Lawrence, but it was merely a tension within the same world

¹ Paper, dated 7 Sept. 1820: Kaye, *Papers of Metcalfe*, pp. 151-2.

² Malcolm to Gerald Wellesley: Kaye, *Malcolm*, vol. ii, p. 378.

of ideas. Indeed Metcalfe, while favouring direct rule and an unsentimental policy towards the Indian aristocracy, and priding himself on his political liberalism, was at heart the most conservative of his group. His liberalism consisted, in fact, of a few superficial measures, such as freedom of the press and the unrestricted immigration of Europeans. When asked in 1829, in connexion with the renewal of the Company's Charter, for his views on future policy, he penned a minute filled with the deepest pessimism. At a time when Bentham was feeling 'as if the golden age of British India were lying before me', when Charles Trevelyan thought that it could not 'be concealed that India is on the eve of a great moral change',¹ Metcalfe was meditating on the mortality of empire. 'Empires grow old, decay, and perish. Ours in India can hardly be called old, but seems destined to be short-lived. We appear to have passed the brilliancy and vigor of our youth, and it may be that we have reached a premature old age.'² In the age of reform after Bentinck's arrival, when Metcalfe was a member of the Supreme Council at Calcutta, he found himself in an alien world. Although personally on good terms with his colleagues, he confessed that in his official views he stood quite alone among them, and every day tended to widen the separation.³

The common aim of the paternalist school was to conserve the original institutions of Indian society rather than to construct that society anew. Metcalfe had been schooled in Wellesley's haughtiness towards the Indian aristocracy, and scorned sharing with it 'the aristocracy of office'. But his vision was of a benevolent paternalism founded on the unchanging 'village republics', and he never contemplated a system of direct rule that would remould India in the image of the West. He never ceased to acknowledge Munro as master, and to pursue Munro's ideal of a prosperous society of yeoman farmers enjoying a freehold property

¹ Draft letter, Bentham to Bentinck, 19 Nov. 1829 (original not in Bentinck MSS.); Bentham MSS., Box X, f. 179. C. E. Trevelyan to Bentinck, 9 April 1834: Bentinck MSS.

² Minute on future government of India, 11 Oct. 1829. Kaye gives extracts, *Papers of Metcalfe*, pp. 161-77. The original is in the Bentinck MSS., dated 11 Oct. 1829, and with Bentinck's comments given marginally.

³ A private letter, dated 8 March 1828: Kaye, *Papers of Metcalfe*, p. 170.

right.¹ Malcolm and Elphinstone disliked the notion of sacrificing the aristocracy in the interests of the peasantry, and wanted to preserve Indian society in all its rich variety. Apart from this difference of emphasis, the group was drawn together by the feeling of having to wage a common struggle against alien forces which were bent on sweeping away the old India they loved.

The spirit which they fought they termed 'regulation' or 'innovation'; and they made little attempt to analyse its manifestations. They knew it most clearly in the form of the Cornwallis settlement, and in the eighteen-twenties they recognized its presence in a new aggressive shape. All spoke against it.

The ruling vice of our government is innovation . . . it is time that we should learn that neither the face of the country, its property, nor its society, are things that can be suddenly improved by any contrivance of ours, though they may be greatly injured by what we mean for their good; that we should take every country as we find it, and not rashly attempt to regulate its landed property either in accumulation or division.²

This was the first lesson according to Munro, and it followed for him that the task of government was paternal protection and little more.

It is too much regulation that ruins everything. Englishmen are as great fanatics in politics as Mahomedans in religion. They suppose that no country can be saved without English institutions. The natives of this country have enough of their own to answer every useful object of internal administration, and if we maintain and protect them, the country will in a very few months settle itself.³

To Munro politics were essentially experimental and pragmatic. The brief period the British had spent on problems of government in India was far too short for any permanent solution to be found.⁴ The result of precipitancy and 'the zeal for permanency' had been the social upheaval in Bengal,

¹ Metcalfe's Minute on Revenue Administration of Delhi Territory, 1815: Kaye, *Papers of Metcalfe*, pp. 43-44. Cf. also Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, chap. v.

² Minute of Munro 'On the state of the country', 31 Dec. 1824: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. iii, p. 381.

³ Munro to Elphinstone (on future administration of conquered Mahratta country), 12 May 1818: *ibid.*, p. 252.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.

consequent on Cornwallis's misreading of the problem. By recognizing a proprietary right in the great *zemindars*, a revolution had been effected in Bengal which had grievously weakened the whole structure, and made the task of administration infinitely more difficult.

Against the Cornwallis system the four men spoke with one voice.¹ They saw it as a system of abstract principles inapplicable to India, as an impersonal bureaucracy instead of a personal, human, and tangible form of government. Government conducted from the office, rather than from the tent and the saddle, necessarily proceeded by forms and precedents; and when its functions were kept confined to the operation of courts of justice and to the mere realization of the revenue, its criterion of success was similarly limited to superficialities—to the speed with which judicial business was dispatched, and the volume and promptitude of revenue payments. Malcolm said he dreaded no

human being (certainly no Nabob or Maharajah) . . . half so much as an able Calcutta civilian, whose travels are limited to two or three hundred miles, with a hookah in his mouth, some good but abstract maxims in his head, the Regulations in his right hand, the Company's Charter in his left, and a quire of wire-woven foolscap before him.²

And Munro, as Governor of Madras, wrote to Canning in 1823, that he had not credited that the records of government 'contained such useless trash'.

Every man writes as much as he can, and quotes Montesquieu, and Hume, and Adam Smith, and speaks as if he were living in a country where people were free and governed themselves. Most of their papers might have been written by men who were never out of England, and their projects are nearly as applicable to that country as to India.³

In contrast to the abstractions of the rule of law, and the blind, automatic operation of an impersonal bureaucracy, Munro's school looked to a continuation of the Indian tradition of personal government. Apart from the reserva-

¹ Cf. Malcolm to Malony, 'Correspondence 1817-21': Kaye, *Malcolm*, vol. ii, p. 391. Metcalfe's paper of 29 June 1820: Kaye, *Papers of Metcalfe*, pp. 150-1. Elphinstone to Strachey, 3 Sept. 1820, and 21 April 1821: Colebrooke, *Elphinstone*, vol. ii, pp. 115 et seq., 124 et seq.

² Malcolm to Malony, 8 April 1821: Kaye, *Malcolm*, vol. ii, pp. 335-6.

³ Munro to Canning, 1 May 1823: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. ii, p. 66.

tions of Metcalfe, they saw in the preservation of the Indian states one method of pursuing their aim, and, at the same time, of providing a possible haven for the culture and higher graces of Indian life. While aware of the irregularity and frequent oppressiveness of princely governments, they recognized that ultimately these were closer to their own ideal. Devoid of the artificial legalism of the Presidencies, where the race went to the quick-witted, the Indian states maintained a rough, natural simplicity and personal character. They provided a focus for the ordinary instincts of loyalty and racial sentiment, and satisfied, as British rule never could, the need of a peasant society for paternal direction and an easily intelligible form of law and government. This tradition Munro and his contemporaries wished to adapt for the territories under direct British rule. To the *ryot*, government must be represented simply; not by a multiplicity of officers and a multiplicity of written forms, but by a single officer, who had powers to inquire, to judge, and to punish, without the delay and intricacies of the Western legal process.¹ This officer was not to be a distant and awful figure, presiding in his cutcherry like a deity in his temple, but a familiar lord, visiting and speaking with them of their quarrels and their crops, and looked up to as *ma-bap*, father and mother. In practical terms this meant a union of powers, at least at the district level. None but Metcalfe had the logical temerity to propose their absolute union and the abolition of a separate judiciary; but they all agreed that the collector should be accorded magisterial powers, which would give him control of the district police and a power of summary punishment. The collector's office was to be the great executive office of local government, controlling in firm subordination the whole inferior executive arm.

The extent of his command was greatly magnified in all territories, other than Bengal, by the form of land revenue settlement. By circumstance and deliberate choice, Munro's *ryotwar* system eschewed all intermediaries and settled directly with each peasant for his individual holding. This fact, and the detailed work which an annual settlement

¹ Cf. Munro, Minute 'On the state of the country', 31 Dec. 1824: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. iii, p. 379.

imposed, necessitated a much larger staff of subordinates and a much more active type of government. The State consciously assumed an administrative responsibility for the mass of the people which it had just as consciously abdicated in Bengal. In the new Bombay territories Munro's system was adopted, and also in a modified form in the Ceded and Conquered Provinces after 1819.

Such a policy was founded on the contrary assumption to that of Cornwallis; the end was the protection of the community by government and not against it. The whole apparatus for checking and counterbalancing political power, by which Cornwallis sought to prevent its abuse, was rejected. Metcalfe had stated the plea for a new unity of government in its extreme form:

Revenue, and judicial, and when practicable, military powers also, should be exercised by the same person; union, not division, should be the order of our rule. Confidence [in the Company's civil servants], not distrust, should be the engine to work with.¹

This plea for unity is to be carefully distinguished, however, from that for uniformity, with which it was to be confounded in a reforming age. Malcolm was the foremost to recognize the need for a more unified system of government, once the peninsula was bestridden. He was alive to the requirements of economy, efficiency, and a greater consistency of principle. But he believed these objects should be attained by the delegation of full powers to trusted individuals, and not through a deadening centralized administration.² To reform, as such, none of Munro's school was hostile. With varying degrees of enthusiasm they favoured liberal measures, whether it was the admission of Indians to higher posts in the civil service, or a broad-based educational scheme. But they had no sympathy with the intellectual foundation of the new reforming creeds and the attitude these engendered. It was not easy for them to distinguish readily the forces of the age. The passion for uniformity, for mechanistic administration and legislative regulation, which possessed the Utilitarians, was easily confused with their life-long enemy, the system of

¹ Paper of 29 June 1820: Kaye, *Papers of Metcalfe*, p. 150.

² Malcolm, *Political History*, vol. ii, p. 142.

Cornwallis. Yet, on the other hand, they were largely in agreement with certain aspects of the Utilitarian viewpoint. The union of judicial and executive powers in the collector; the simplification of the chaotic jungle of the law to a compact intelligible code which respected Indian custom; the prejudice for a *ryotwar* form of land settlement; and an accurate survey and record of landed rights—in all these reforms they were in agreement with the radical authoritarian strain in Utilitarian thought. But to the spirit of utilitarianism they were as uncompromisingly hostile as Burke. Against the abstract goodness of proposed measures they had no argument; but with the faith of Burke, they countered the new spirit by an appeal to history and experience, and by a counsel of moderation and patience.

Politics to them were experiential in nature, necessarily near-sighted, and essentially limited in their achievement. Hence they were not to be pursued dogmatically along a path of violent change:

The most important of the lessons we can derive from past experience is to be slow and cautious in every procedure which has a tendency to collision with the habits and prejudices of our native subjects. We may be compelled by the character of our government to frame some institutions, different from those we found established, but we should adopt all we can of the latter into our system. . . . our internal government . . . should be administered on a principle of humility not pride. We must divest our minds of all arrogant pretensions arising from the presumed superiority of our own knowledge, and seek the accomplishment of the great ends we have in view by the means which are best suited to the peculiar nature of the objects. . . . That time may gradually effect a change, there is no doubt; but the period is as yet distant when that can be expected; and come when it will, to be safe or beneficial, it must be . . . the work of society itself. All that Government can do is, by maintaining the internal peace of the country, and by adapting its principles to the various feelings, habits, and character of its inhabitants, to give time for the slow and silent operation of the desired improvement, with a constant impression that every attempt to accelerate this end will be attended with the danger of its defeat.¹

There was no sympathy with the belief in sudden improvement or sudden illumination, which gave to the Utilitarians

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

and Evangelicals the gift of an untroubled assurance. Human nature could never be for them, as with James Mill, 'as plain as the road from Charing Cross to St. Paul's'.¹

I have no faith in the modern doctrine of the rapid improvement of the Hindoos, or of any other people. The character of the Hindoos is probably much the same as when Vasco da Gama first visited India, and it is not likely that it will be much better a century hence.

When I read as I sometimes do, of a measure by which a large province has been suddenly improved, or a race of semi-barbarians civilized almost to quakerism, I throw away the book.²

Except for Elphinstone, they had little but contempt for the doctrines of the 'philosophes' and rejected that theory which attributed to government a preponderant influence in the shaping of society.³ It followed from their notion of the relative ineffectualness of political authority that the function of government was simply one of paternal protection. The passion for legislation which possessed the Utilitarians found no favour with them,⁴ for they were convinced that all the great changes in human society came from sources much deeper than the superficial activities of politicians. 'Great and beneficial alterations in society, to be complete, must be produced within the society itself; they cannot be the mere fabrication of its superiors, or of a few who deem themselves enlightened.'⁵

In accordance with their view of politics as an experimental art, they all believed in the need to retain a principle of diversity in Indian government. A centrally imposed uniformity, such as the Utilitarians seemed to contemplate, was anathema to them. Even Elphinstone, who looked with least aversion on the new political lights, rejected the notion of a single 'omni-competent' central government to replace the multiple structure of the three semi-independent Presidencies, a plan which the Utilitarians wished to embody in

¹ Cited E. Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, p. 451.

² Munro to Canning, 30 June 1821: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. ii, p. 57. Letter of Munro, 19 July 1824: *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

³ Cf. Munro to his sister, 5 March 1795: *Munro*, vol. i, p. 163. Also Metcalfe, *Common Place Book*, 5 May 1803: Kaye, *Metcalfe*, vol. i, pp. 109-10.

⁴ Cf. Munro's policy as Governor of Madras. Minute of 31 Dec. 1824: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. iii, p. 380: 'For some years past it has been the object of Government to legislate as little as possible.'

⁵ Malcolm, *Central India*, vol. ii, p. 281.

the Charter Act of 1833.¹ The dread of a colourless uniformity is, indeed, a facet of the Romantic outlook. Munro in a half-humorous letter on the political economists and speculative philosophers bursts into sincere eloquence against the condition of uniformity to which they would bring the world:

to such a state of dull uniform repose, give me a thousand times in preference the world as it now stands, with all its beautiful variety of knowledge and ignorance—of language—of manners, customs—religions and superstitions—of cultivated fields and wide-extended deserts—of war and peace.²

2. *Liberalism and the Policy of Assimilation*

So far the administrative history of India before 1818 has been discussed in terms of the ideas or attitudes governing the two great rival systems of administration established in Bengal and Madras. These systems, despite later modification, were to be permanent. Other notions and attitudes were to arise, but they were accommodated within the framework of the original structures.

The practical problem of Cornwallis's time had been the creation of an efficient administrative machinery, which would provide peace and dispense justice, repair the Company's finances ruined by corruption and misgovernment, and achieve the ultimate aim of realizing a regular surplus of revenue sufficient to purchase the Company's annual investment of Indian piece-goods and China tea. The solution of the problem had entailed sweeping away the decaying system of indirect rule, initiated by Clive and continued in another form by Hastings, by which the Company had attempted to limit its interference and work largely through the native system of administration. Resort was now had to the systematic use of English officers in an English administrative system. The Cornwallis settlement

¹ Elphinstone, in his letter to the Select Committee on Indian Affairs in 1832, stressed the need to retain the legislative independence of the three Presidencies: Colebrooke, *Elphinstone*, vol. ii, p. 317: 'Our government should still be considered as in a great measure experimental; and it is an advantage to have three experiments, and to compare them in their progress with each other.' Munro expressed the same opinion: Gleig, *Munro*, vol. ii, p. 264.

² Munro to his sister, 5 March 1795: *ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 165-6.

of Bengal was a deliberate movement of anglicization, and Munro's work in Madras, although attempting to keep the interference with the existing society to a minimum, carried the same imprint. Both Cornwallis's *zemindari* and Munro's *ryotwari* structures involved the active assumption of the work of government by English officers; both rested on the institution of private property rights in land, secured and maintained by a Western law system. Both might therefore become instruments to inaugurate a fundamental change in the customary modes of land tenure, the heart of Indian society. Yet their spirit was far from revolutionary. Munro had certainly no notion that he was facilitating the commercialization of the land and the break-up of customary society, when he sought to give the Madras peasant a private-property right in his holding. It has been seen how his intention was simply to strengthen the position of the *ryot* and his way of life, by giving him the certainty of a fixed revenue demand and an established tenurial right. With Cornwallis, although the leaning towards change was much more conscious, the temper was still conservative. Cornwallis's intention was to bring order and stability to a society fast dissolving, and not to bring about a social revolution which would effect its complete transformation. His solution was Whig: government reduced to the minimal functions of justice and protection from violence, in a society stabilized by the influence naturally emanating from a great landed aristocracy. His aims were still consistent with the old mercantilist conception of the British position in India, with the notion of reaping a surplus tribute and continuing the monopoly of the East India Company. They were also consistent with the idea of insulating India from the shock of collision with the West by restricting the settlement of Europeans.¹ Whatever his successors may have done with his work, Cornwallis was no apostle of the doctrine of assimilation.

The movement of anglicization in Cornwallis's administrative settlement was thus definite but limited. The move-

¹ For Cornwallis's views on the value of the Bengal territories to Britain, and his ideas on the Company's monopoly, see his Minute of 10 Feb. 1790, and his letter to Dundas of 4 April 1790: Forrest, *Cornwallis*, vol. ii, pp. 114, 185 et seq.

ment was, however, to be carried forward in the opening years of the nineteenth century in a much more violent and extreme form. Hitherto it had been confined in its operation to the form and methods of government. With the impetus it was given by the twin force of evangelicalism and free trade, it was now to be consciously directed upon Indian society itself and to become an explicit movement for revolutionary change.

Cornwallis's reforms had undoubtedly owed part of their character to the outlook of his chief advisers, John Shore (later Lord Teignmouth) and Charles Grant, who on retirement both became prominent members of the Clapham Sect and were numbered among the Evangelical Fathers. Cornwallis's distrust and consequent disuse of Indian officials, and his determination to find a solution in an English-officered, English type of administration, certainly reflects the growing contempt in which Indian institutions and methods were held under the influence of this movement of religious revival. To some extent the change in attitude was an inevitable one. The transformation of the English in India from suppliant merchants to a ruling caste, consciously isolated and imbued with a sense of racial superiority, was a natural consequence of their career of conquest. The growth of a considerable European population, in particular of the number of English women, also made for a more regular and settled mode of life, and diminished contact between the races.¹ Yet the change that was everywhere noted as taking shape after Cornwallis came out to Bengal in 1786 was much more than a response to changed political circumstances. The improvement in moral tone was not a merely local phenomenon. It was a change being wrought in the character of the Englishman at his centre; the product of advancing industrialism, of the ascendancy of the new middle classes, and of the emergence of a new ethic for a new society. Originating with Wesley and Whitfield in the form of methodism, the new outlook assumed importance when it began to find adherents among the upper middle classes under the name of the Evangelical revival in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Its influence in English history is

¹ Cf. Percival Spear, *The Nabobs*, chap. viii.

too pervasive to be measured by any conventional yardstick. Halévy believed it to be the cement which preserved English society from violent dissolution in the Revolutionary era; all historians recognize its importance as the moral agency responsible for Victorian 'respectability', the power which tamed and disciplined the anarchic individualism of the Industrial Revolution. Its connexion with India is particularly intimate, because of Shore and Grant who on their return to England went to live as neighbours to Wilberforce at Clapham, and, together with Zachary Macaulay, Henry Thornton, and John Venn, formed the Clapham Sect.¹ The influence of this group sprang from its leadership of Evangelical and Methodist opinion on political issues. Wilberforce, as a personal friend of Pitt, and Grant, as a director and for many years chairman of the East India Company, were able to command a powerful minority in the Commons. The two great objects which the Clapham Sect set themselves were the abolition of the Slave Trade and the opening of India to missionary enterprise. The measure of their success in the latter object—'that greatest of all causes, for I really place it before Abolition', as Wilberforce said—has often been recounted.² With Grant providing funds, knowledge, and influence, and Charles Simeon at Cambridge the spiritual leadership, a small number of Evangelical missionaries were sent out to India, the foremost of whom were David Brown, Claudius Buchanan, Henry Martyn, and Thomas Thomason. After years of public controversy, a large measure of freedom was won for missionary enterprise in the Charter Act of 1813, and an Indian Church with a bishop and three archdeacons was established. It is more difficult to estimate the Evangelical influence on the moral tone of European society in India, and probably this was more affected by the wider action of the Evangelical movement on society in England than by any local success. After winning a secure foothold in India, the missionaries directed what political interest they had to

¹ Charles Grant went to live at Clapham in 1794: Henry Morris, *Life of Charles Grant*, p. 168.

² Cf. J. W. Kaye, *Christianity in India*, and Morris, *Grant*. Wilberforce's description of Indian missions as 'the greatest of all causes': R. and S. Wilberforce, *Life of Wilberforce*, vol. v, p. 126.

securing the legal protection of Christian converts, the suppression of inhuman rites such as 'suttee' and infanticide, and the disconnexion of the British power from the support of temples and Hindu and Muslim religious festivals. Yet if the orbit of its activity had been circumscribed in this manner, the Evangelical movement would have had comparatively little political importance. The fact that it stood for an ultimate transformation of Indian society brought it, however, into alliance with other powerful political currents.

The terms and nature of the alliance were first foreshadowed in the treatise which Charles Grant wrote on his return from India, and which he had privately printed and laid before the Court of Directors in 1797, under the title, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the Means of Improving it*. This was published as a Parliamentary Paper in 1813 and again in 1832.¹ Naturally it was cast in a moderate and restrained tone, but it gives a fair exhibition of the Evangelical mentality. It would be well to recall the general features of this mentality before dealing with the details of Grant's treatise. The 'notes' of the Evangelical mind were a consuming earnestness and conviction, born of a transfiguring religious experience. The working of this inner experience was the essential gift of the Evangelical faith, the experience of conversion, of being 'born again'. And by the terms it used to describe itself, 'vital religion', 'practical Christianity', it meant an experience actually felt physically and mentally in the anguish and terror of sin and the ecstatic joy of rebirth. Resulting in a complete transformation of the personality, the process of conversion, of 'justification and sanctification', consisted in the soul turning in upon itself, and stripping itself bare of the clothing of habit smothering its awareness. For a man to become alive it was necessary for him to become aware of his thralldom, to know that he did not govern himself, but was a dead thing borne along helplessly by his own appetites and the fashions and opinions of the world. This was the weight of sin which hung upon everyone and could only be thrown off by each man individually coming to terms with his God; it could not

¹ P.P., 1813, vol. x, p. 31 and P.P., 1831-2, vol. viii, Appendix.

be shifted or palliated by other human agency, by the mediation of priest or the performance of outward religious rites. The experience of being saved was one of a sudden illumination coming after the consciousness and repentance of sin, and its fruit was the gift of true self-government, the power of resting on one's own centre and consciously choosing the course of life instead of remaining a slave to outward circumstance and custom. It made the path of duty plain. That path lay, firstly, in the preservation of the soul in its state of grace through prayer and work, and secondly, in the mission to evangelize. Hence the Evangelical gospel, although originating in an intense interior experience, was one of action and mission in the external world. Work, requiring industry, frugality, and perseverance, was an end in its own right, the outward daily discipline of the soul against sloth; but it also afforded the material means for furthering the Kingdom on earth. The communication of the saving knowledge to the millions that dwelt in darkness could only be accomplished by preaching the word among them in a direct assault on their mind. It was not, of course, primarily an intellectual task, for the inward experience could not be reduced to rational terms. All refined worldly learning was a snare for the soul, but certain elementary mental accomplishments were necessary. If salvation was only attainable through the direct encounter of the individual personality with God, it was equally true that knowledge of God was possible only through knowledge of His revealed word. Both Methodists and Evangelicals concentrated, therefore, on securing a minimum standard of education as a pre-requisite for conversion, at least sufficient for a person to read and understand the Bible.

The three most important features of the Evangelical mind for the present purpose were its intense individualism and exaltation of individual conscience, its belief that human character could be suddenly and totally transformed by a direct assault on the mind, and finally, its conviction that this required an educative process. These convictions were contained in a cast of mind which was almost Hebraic. To the Evangelicals the hand of God was visible in history, and nowhere more surely than in the miraculous subjugation of

India by a handful of English. Power carried with it an awful responsibility and duty, the evangelization of India's heathen millions. The plight of these millions was desperate, for they were not men with a feeble knowledge of God, but actual worshippers of false gods and graven images. And to the Evangelical their error was not simply false doctrine; it smelt as an unclean thing. The Hindu divinities for Wilberforce were 'absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness and cruelty. In short, their religious system is one grand abomination.'¹

Grant's treatise was a plea for carrying forward the work of evangelizing India as the great duty and interest of the British power. The major part of his work was devoted to proving the immeasurable degradation into which Indian society was sunk. With a wealth of quotation from Hindu writings and from the observations of European travellers, Grant drew a picture of an India immersed in the most appalling depths of bestial superstition and social corruption, a veritable Sodom and Gomorrah on earth. His indictment is drawn in solemn measured terms:

Upon the whole then, we cannot avoid recognizing in the people of Hindostan, a race of men lamentably degenerate and base; retaining but a feeble sense of moral obligation; yet obstinate in their disregard of what they know to be right, governed by malevolent and licentious passions, strongly exemplifying the effects produced on society by a great and general corruption of manners, and sunk in misery by their vices, in a country peculiarly calculated by its natural advantages, to promote the prosperity of its inhabitants.²

In this dread judgement Grant not merely condemned the religions of India but everything which might claim a civilized status for its peoples—their laws, arts, agriculture and handicrafts, and their personal manners and habits. In defining the causes of this degraded state of society Grant argued typically of his century. Character was a product of environment, but of moral rather than physical environment. The great moral force in India was the Hindu form of

¹ Speech of William Wilberforce, 22 June 1813: *Hansard*, 1st series, vol. xxvi, p. 164.

² Charles Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving it. Written chiefly in Year 1792* (privately printed, 1797), p. 71.

government and law, and above all, the Hindu religion. Their common character was their despotic nature; and here was the source of Indian ills.¹ Despotism destroyed the autonomy of the individual soul and so extinguished the source of virtue, since the man 'who is dependent on the will of another . . . thinks and acts as a degraded being' and 'fear necessarily becomes his grand principle of action'.² Admittedly the unrestrained despotism of the Hindu political system had been abolished in the British territories, but the tyranny of the Hindu law and the Hindu religion continued almost unabated. The dominion of the Brahmin class remained unshaken, the 'crafty and imperious priesthood, who feigned a divine revelation and appointment, to invest their own order in perpetuity with the most absolute empire over the civil state of the Hindoos, as well as over their minds'.³ The root of all evil was this tyranny over the mind, a tyranny which could not be dispelled by a mere reformation in the law. The Hindu law had been and could be further modified, but it was a vital Evangelical doctrine that legislation was powerless to change human character.⁴ Everything ultimately rested upon the inward workings of the individual soul. Grant's panacea for India envisaged an Indian counterpart of the European Reformation, capable of liberating the individual conscience from the tyranny of the priest. That tyranny was maintained because of the ignorance of the people and the hold which the vast fabric of superstition exercised over their lives. To free the mind education was the first requirement. To prepare it for the knowledge of Christian truth, it had first to be cleared of error and superstition, and education recommended itself for reasons of prudence. It was the least obtrusive method of evangelizing, the least likely to create any social or political disturbance. It would 'silently undermine . . . the fabric of error', and by restoring to the inhabitants of India the use of their reason would in itself work a great moral revolution.

There is no need to question Grant's sincerity in placing such emphasis on education. Admittedly, it was free from

¹ Grant, *Observations*, p. 74.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173. Cf. one of the chief Evangelical authorities, Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man*, 5th edn., 1798, pp. 56-57.

the violent objections raised against direct methods of evangelizing, but it had an intrinsic importance as an integral part of the process of conversion. Grant did not hold that Christianity could be implanted by an attack launched solely at the strongpoints of religious belief. He thought it could only be victorious if the attack were made on a much broader front, so that the Indian character could be subjected to the play of reformatory influences from every angle.¹ The whole of the Western mind had to be introduced into India. For the benefits of Christianity were not only religious but also material, and Grant was advancing no less than a proposal for the further civilization of a people, who had very early made a considerable progress in improvement, but who, by deliberate and successful plans of fraud and imposition, were rendered first stationary, then retrograde.² The progress of Europe in comfort and wealth was a direct outcome of the liberation of the individual achieved by the Reformation;³ and Wilberforce echoed Grant, in his speech during the Charter debates of 1813, when he claimed that

Christianity, independently of its effects on a future state of existence, has been acknowledged even by avowed sceptics, to be, beyond all other institutions that ever existed, favourable to the temporal interests and happiness of man: and never was there a country where there is a greater need than in India for the diffusion of its genial influence.³

The Evangelical had an almost Hebraic conviction that worldly success and power, although not to be striven for on their own account, attended the faithful pursuit of duty, and were instrumental in forwarding God's purposes in the world.⁴ And here was the whole strength of their case. Duty

¹ Wilberforce held the same view. Wilberforce to Lord Wellesley, 6 April 1813: R. and S. Wilberforce, *Wilberforce*, vol. v, p. 111.

² Grant, *Observations*, p. 192 n.: 'That grand event introduced new light: and it was diffused among the lower orders, whose instruction became henceforth an object of particular care. The consequences were greater internal order, peace, and stability; thence sprung enlarged industry, adventurous enterprises and all the long succession of prosperity which this country has enjoyed.'

³ Speech of Wilberforce, 21 June 1813: *Hansard*, First Series, vol. xxvi, p. 8, cited E. H. Howse, *Saints in Politics*, pp. 89-90.

⁴ Cf. Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians*, Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, London, n.d. [1888?], pp. 113-14, 192 et seq. Also Henry Venn, *Complete Duty of Man*, pp. 277-8.

and self-interest were one. To educate and to evangelize was also to make the earth pour forth her abundance. Released from the chains of immemorial habit, his mind set free from ignorance and superstition, the individual in India would have both the disposition and the knowledge to improve his earthly condition. Grant had reached the crux of his argument. The promotion of civilization and material prosperity in India would immensely further the original and continuing purpose of the British in the East: the great beneficiary would be British commerce.

In considering the affairs of the world as under the control of the Supreme Disposer, and those distant territories . . . providentially put into our hands . . . is it not necessary to conclude that they were given to us, not merely that we might draw an annual profit from them, but that we might diffuse among their inhabitants, long sunk in darkness, vice and misery, the light and benign influence of the truth, the blessings of well-regulated society, the improvements and comforts of active industry? . . . In every progressive step of this work, we shall also serve the original design with which we visited India, that design still so important to this country—the extension of our commerce.¹

Hitherto British manufacturers had found only a limited market in India because of the poverty of the people and their unformed taste. Education and Christianity would now remove these obstacles. In this way 'the noblest species of conquest', the spread of true religion and knowledge, would not forfeit its earthly reward; for 'wherever our principles and our language are introduced, our commerce will follow'.

In demonstrating the natural alliance between his views and the interests of British commerce, Grant argued that the key principle of British policy must be 'plainly the principle of assimilation'. At present the British were in every way different from their Indian subjects, in language, manners, customs, sentiments, religion. There must be consequently among the latter a feeling that their interests were opposed. The healing principle which should close the dangerous gulf was that of assimilation. If India were anglicized, a community of interest would be established.² In 1813, on the occasion of the renewal of the Company's Charter, the Evangelicals launched a great public campaign

¹ Grant, *Observations*, p. 220.

² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

to put Grant's ideas into practice. They were victorious in securing an Indian Church establishment, freedom for missionary work, and the appropriation of an annual sum for education. The parliamentary struggle was led by Wilberforce and he drew frankly on Grant's treatise for his arguments. But in the flight of his eloquence, the qualifications which Grant's sense of prudence had imposed were forgotten. Wilberforce voiced the full-blooded doctrine of assimilation:

. . . let us endeavour to strike our roots into the soil by the gradual introduction and establishment of our own principles and opinions; of our laws, institutions, and manners; above all, as the source of every other improvement, of our religion, and consequently of our morals. . . . Are we so little aware of the vast superiority even of European laws and institutions, and far more of British institutions, over those of Asia, as not to be prepared to predict with confidence, that the Indian community which should have exchanged its dark and bloody superstitions for the genial influence of Christian light and truth, would have experienced such an increase of civil order and security, of social pleasures and domestic comforts, as to be desirous of preserving the blessings it should have acquired; and can we doubt that it would be bound even by the ties of gratitude to those who have been the honoured instruments of communicating them?¹

The Evangelical view stood in complete contrast to the East India Company's traditional attitude. From motives of expediency the Company had always manifested the most scrupulous regard for Indian religions, laws, institutions, and customs. Clive had taught the theory of 'double government', and only with great reluctance had the Company been forced into the open and taken upon itself the direct task of administration. Even after 1772 when it had stood forth 'in the character of Dewan', the Company under Hastings's guidance had been anxious to keep as far as possible to the traditional Indian methods and forms of government. 'We have endeavoured', wrote Hastings of his administrative reforms, 'to adapt our Regulations to the Manners and Understanding of the People, and Exigencies

¹ *Substance of the Speeches of William Wilberforce Esq., on the Clause in the East-India Bill for Promoting the Religious Instruction and Moral Improvement of the Natives of the British Dominions in India, on the 22nd June and the 1st & 12th of July 1813, 1813, pp. 92-93.*

of the Country, adhering, as closely as we are able, to their Ancient Usages and Institutions.¹ Cornwallis had frankly broken with Hastings's policy in the forms and methods of government, and Teignmouth made a great point of this in defending the Evangelical case against the attacks of Scott Waring and others, who argued that until the mutiny at Vellore the British had always striven to preserve the indigenous system.² But Cornwallis's attitude was essentially one of non-interference in Indian society, once the framework of what he considered a sound system of justice and revenue had been established. He had no sympathy with Evangelical hopes for the conversion of the people, considering such hopes utterly visionary.³ So far as the interests of the Company's subjects were concerned, his aims were enshrined in his Code of Regulations, 'to preserve to them the laws of the Shastre and the Koran in matters to which they have been invariably applied, to protect them in the free exercise of their religion, and to afford security to their persons and property'.⁴ Not merely did the Evangelicals now challenge the traditional policy of the Company, they came forward with its direct opposite—the policy of assimilation. And they sought to carry their aims by harnessing their cause to the most powerful political force of their time, the interests of British commerce.

The first generation of the Clapham Sect were, however, unfitted to cement this alliance between the 'civilizing mission' and commerce. They were not cast for the role of revolutionaries, since it was in effect a revolution in the relationship between England and India for which they were calling. In English politics they were decidedly conservative, even numbering themselves among the stern, unbending Tories of the Sidmouth period. With respect to India they had a deep vested interest in the existing order.

¹ Hastings to Court of Directors, 3 Nov. 1772: cited G. W. Forrest, *Selections from the State Papers of the Governors-General of India: Warren Hastings*, vol. ii, Appendix A, p. 277.

² *Considerations on the Practicability, Policy, and Obligation of Communicating to the Natives of India the Knowledge of Christianity*. By a Late Resident of Bengal, 1808 [ascribed to Lord Teignmouth in India Office Library Tracts, vol. 96], pp. 23 et seq. For this controversy see Kaye, *Christianity in India*.

³ David Brown to Charles Simeon, Feb. 1789: Kaye, *Christianity in India*, p. 371.

⁴ Preamble to Regulation III, 1793: *ibid.*, pp. 374–5.

They were intimately connected with the Company and publicly defended its commercial monopoly, Grant himself and his sons leading the fight in 1812 for the defence of the Company's privileges. Yet the policy of assimilation and its identification with the interests of British commerce could rest on no other grounds than the closest and freest intercourse with India, and the end of all barriers which opposed the ingress of the West. However staunchly they opposed it, the logical corollary of their policy was free trade, free European settlement, and the complete abolition of the Company as a commercial organ.

The full implications of the principle of 'assimilation' were grasped by the free-trade merchants, who ranged themselves against the Company when the renewal of the Charter was debated in 1813. Their adherence to the principle stemmed from their reading of the trading position. It was certainly true that the economic purpose behind British rule required to be revalued. The Company still continued to look upon it in vaguely mercantilist terms. The Indian trade in itself had ceased to be of first importance after the Company won the command of the revenues of the Bengal territories in 1757. Henceforward the annual 'investment' of Indian piece-goods was considered mainly as a means of transmitting the surplus revenues of Bengal to provide for the dividends of the Company in London; but towards the end of the eighteenth century it had been found more profitable to provide for the Company's dividends by shipping home China tea, purchased out of the proceeds of the Company's opium monopoly. Even Adam Smith, despite his violent attack on the Company, saw nothing wrong with the notion of reaping a tribute from the surplus revenue of the British territories in India;¹ and this mercantilist notion, that political dominion existed for the sake of drawing off a tribute, still lingered into the nineteenth century. In practice, however, Wellesley's conquests had piled up a debt burden which made it impossible to realize. By 1813 the Company had no case for maintaining its monopoly of trade between India and Europe. The sale of Indian piece-goods in Europe had fallen away almost completely; and the British territories no longer afforded a

¹ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, ed. E. Cannan, 5th edn., 1930, vol. ii, p. 431.

surplus of revenue after the Company's administrative and debt charges had been met. The Company in India had become a purely military and administrative power, and in fact was only able to pay its way with the profits of its opium monopoly, which it used to finance the China tea trade.

The fact that territorial dominion had proved itself to be without profit for the Company and Great Britain was quickly seized upon by the free traders. Not only was the Company's rule without benefit to itself, but it was, they argued, positively ruinous to India. The notion of tribute meant draining the country of wealth and impairing its power to purchase British goods. The Company was uninterested in finding a market for British goods in India, and, in any case, had neither the capital, skill, nor incentive, to develop its vast monopoly trading area, which stretched in the grandiose terms of its Charter 'between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan'. In the eyes of the free merchants the ultimate advantage of political dominion was an indirect one. The proper object of imperial rule was limited, as for government in general, to the efficient provision of law and order. Having established these primary conditions, the question of the profitability of the Indian connexion could be safely allowed to look after itself. For under a free trade India would rise rapidly into prosperity as a market for British manufactures and a source of raw materials. The Company should therefore cease to combine the contrary functions of ruler and trader and renounce all connexion with commerce. Superfluous posts and unnecessary pomp, created by the thirst of the Company's servants for private fortune and of the directors for patronage, should be swept away. The financial burden of the Company's administration should be kept as light as possible, so that the wealth of the people could fructify in their pockets and promote trade. All obstacles hindering the free flow of settlers, capital, and goods should be destroyed.¹ Given these circumstances, the prospects were limitless:

The vast peninsula of India has for centuries been harassed by wars and devastation, rendering property very insecure; but if it becomes open to a free trade, under one mild, liberal, and effective government,

¹ See note A, p. 323.

that could protect the property, laws, lives and liberties of the subjects, what a sudden change we might not anticipate? We should not only see the palaces of the Rajah, and the houses of the Vakeels, Aumils, Shrofs, and Zemindars, furnished and decorated with the produce of English arts and manufactures, but the Ryots, who form so large a part of the Indian population, may, like the British farmers, have a taste for foreign produce, as soon as they can acquire property enough to procure it; and this is only to be acquired to that extent under a free and liberal government, where property is held sacred. Under these circumstances a trade might suddenly grow up beyond the Cape of Good Hope, to take off all the surplus manufactures that Britain can produce.¹

The Company did not merely deny to India the benefits of free commerce but its whole policy was designed to prevent Indian 'improvement'. Indeed, its chief argument against opening the Indian trade was that the country was incapable of any rapid improvement, its peoples being too rooted in poverty and inveterate habits and tastes ever to have the means or desire to purchase British manufactures on any considerable scale. The Company summoned an impressive array of witnesses before the Parliamentary Committee in proof of this point, including Warren Hastings, Teignmouth, and Munro.² The free traders naturally countered by urging that a rapid change in the Indian character was certainly possible, and that, once the establishment of law and order and light taxation had assured the Indian of the enjoyment of the fruits of his labour, he would not be backward in acquiring the requisite means and taste for British manufactures. The argument rested on the belief, common to the whole radical school of thought, that human nature was intrinsically the same in all races. As a later spokesman expressed it: 'We may be assured that in buying and selling, human nature is the same in Cawnpore as in Cheapside.'³ Such a belief assumed that acquired characteristics were not innate and were readily alterable—an assumption held by the Evangelicals, and providing the

¹ W. Lester, *The Happy Era of One Hundred Millions of the Human Race, or the Merchant, Manufacturer, and Englishman's Recognised Right to an Unlimited Trade with India*, 1813, pp. 39-40.

² Evidence of Warren Hastings, 30 March 1813: *P.P.*, 1812-13, vol. vii, pp. 1 ff.; Teignmouth, pp. 9 ff.; Malcolm, pp. 53 ff.; Munro, pp. 121 ff.

³ Written evidence of Thomas Bracken (a partner in the leading Calcutta house of agency, Alexander & Co.): *P.P.*, 1831-2, vol. x, Appendix, p. 587.

natural basis for the alliance of attitude between the missionary and the merchant. Already by 1813, the free merchants were extending their attack to the whole of the Company's system of government and to its informing principle of leaving Indian customs and institutions undisturbed.¹

Commercial and missionary opinion were agreed upon the fundamentals of the Indian problem and its solution. Together they generated the colonial policy of nineteenth-century liberalism. This was the policy of assimilation of the anglicizing movement. Because of the close connexion of Grant and Teignmouth with the Company, the alliance of missionary and commercial opinion did not occur in 1813, but by the early eighteen-twenties these groups were rapidly fusing. This was part of a wider process by which Evangelical and non-conformist opinion abandoned its toryism of the Napoleonic War era and went over to the side of reform. It can be best seen in the second generation of the Clapham group. The younger Charles Grant, who in 1813 had delivered one of the finest speeches of his day in defence of the Company, and who continued to defend it in Parliament as late as 1823, passed over to the Whig side, and was the minister for framing the Bill which finally brought the commercial functions of the Company to an end in 1833. His principal assistant on that occasion was the celebrated son of Zachary Macaulay, who to his father's alarm had first imbibed Radical doctrine at Cambridge. In the twenties the British merchants—having won freedom of trade with India in 1813—witnessed with delighted astonishment the cloth and twist of Lancashire displacing even the famed muslin of Dacca in the Indian market.² So unexpected a development confirmed their deepest prejudices, and intensified their interest in the measures of government. For the reversal in the balance of trade, brought about by the triumph of imported cottons and the destruction of the Indian export trade in textiles, raised the threat that the potential market

¹ David Laurie, *Hints Regarding the East India Monopoly—Respectfully Submitted to the British Legislature*, Glasgow, 1813, pp. 50–51.

² Cf. John Prinsep, *Suggestions on Freedom of Commerce and Navigation—More Especially in Reference to the East-India Trade*, 1823, pp. 15–18. None of the free traders had predicted the astonishing rise in the export of British manufactured cottons to India. Technical improvements lowering prices were the main cause.

for British goods would be restricted unless new return products could be found. Measures had to be taken for raising the purchasing power of the Indian population. Thomas Bracken of Alexander & Co. put this quite clearly in his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry in 1832.³ The actual demands of the merchant community were still largely concerned with their own immediate interests. They had still to acquire the legal right to own land, and to enter the Company's territories without licence. 'The unlimited and unshackled application of British capital and intelligence'⁴ was still not fully realized. There were still vexatious customs and internal transit dues to be abolished or reduced. But they instinctively assumed that the path of advance, for themselves and for India, lay in the progressive adoption of English institutions. The great example, constantly before their eyes, was the rise of Calcutta under European control, from a village on a mud-flat to the 'City of Palaces' teeming with a prosperous Indian commercial community. They openly advocated that English law and procedure, with certain modifications, should be gradually extended over the rest of the British territories;⁵ and in 1829 the judges of the Supreme Court put forward a scheme which proposed to bring the whole Ganges delta under the Calcutta Supreme Court's jurisdiction as an experimental measure. One of the chief objects of the scheme was to reduce the complexities of Indian land tenures to the simple relations of landlord and tenant, so that Europeans could purchase land in freehold, and individual energy and capital might be applied to Indian agriculture by Indians themselves.⁶ The other demand of the mercantile community

³ Evidence of Thomas Bracken, 14 March 1832: *P.P.*, 1831–2, vol. x, p. 150 (Qu. 1797).

⁴ *A View of the Present State and Future Prospects of the Free Trade and Colonization of India*, 2nd edn., 1829, p. 16. The author of the pamphlet was John Crawford, who was the representative of the Calcutta mercantile community in the Commons (see p. 62, n. 4). It is ascribed to Crawford in the India Office Library Tracts, and in Ross Donnelly Mangles, *Brief Vindication of the Hon. East India Company's Government of Bengal from the Attacks of Messrs. Richards and Crawford*, 1830.

⁵ Cf. Evidence of Thomas Bracken: *P.P.*, 1831–2, vol. x, Appendix, p. 587. *Bengal Hurkaru*, 11 Sept. 1829 (editorial). Crawford, *View of Present State*, p. 85.

⁶ Letter from Judges of the Calcutta Supreme Court, 13 Sept. 1830, with enclosures: *P.P.*, 1831, vol. vi, pp. 575 et seq.

was for a revenue system which would impose no more than a light permanent assessment on the soil, instead of the punitive, fluctuating assessments that the Company practised outside the Bengal territories. These were the chief measures which government could be expected to effect. They were what John Crawford implied when recommending to the Parliamentary Committee of 1832

that if the Government fulfils its duties, that is, secure an equal and efficient administration of justice, and forbear from imposing burthen-some imposts, or throwing needless impediments in the way of private adventure and the free investment of capital, it may very safely and confidently leave everything else to individual skill and competition.¹

The call for the withdrawal of all governmental interference must not mask the aggressive spirit of the mercantile demands. 'Efficient administration of justice' meant English law, particularly a modern law establishing private-property rights in land, and a system of courts which would ensure that the influence of the law should be fully felt in the remotest hamlet. It meant using law in a revolutionary way, consciously employing it as a weapon to transform Indian society by breaking up the customary, communal tenures. This aggressive spirit filled Crawford's powerful pamphlet of 1829. The Indian Government, he asserted, must drop the ridiculous pose of protecting the weaker Indian community from the stronger and more energetic Europeans. Only by the powerful stimulus of competition would India be aroused. The feeble and ignorant must be placed in a state of collision with the strong and intelligent, for this was the only way of sharpening and invigorating their faculties and of raising them in the scale of society.² There must be an open assertion of the superior civilization. The Government should stand forward as an English government, instead of masquerading as the feudal subject of the Mughal emperor at Delhi, striking coins with his image, and paying him homage through the British Resident at Delhi. English and not Persian should be used as the language of govern-

¹ Written Evidence of John Crawford to Queries of Select Committee, in reply to Query 11: 'Can any measures . . . be suggested to advance the interest of Indian Commerce?': *P.P.*, 1831-2, vol. x, Appendix, p. 388.

² Crawford, *View of Present State*, p. 101.

ment.¹ Above all, the Government should do everything in its power to spread English education, the great civilizing influence.

The Calcutta mercantile community had its own narrower, more selfish standpoint, but substantially it swelled the great tide of liberalism engulfing the English mind in the eighteenth-thirties. Militant in its ardour for expansion, the new outlook renounced all desire for territorial power as an end; impatient of frontiers it wished to secure nothing less than a world empire of trade. As an article in the *Sunday Times* (which the *Bengal Hurkaru* reprinted in 1828) expressed it, it must be 'our policy to abandon altogether a narrow system of colonial aggrandisement which can no longer be pursued with advantage, and to build our greatness on a surer foundation, by stretching our dominion over the wants of the universe'.² The most eloquent expression of this English liberalism is to be found in Macaulay. If the new British Empire were to be a dominion not over territory but over the wants of the universe, it followed that it was more important to civilize than subdue.

The mere extent of empire is not necessarily an advantage. To many governments it has been cumbersome; to some it has been fatal. It will be allowed by every statesman of our time that the prosperity of a country is made up of the prosperity of those who compose the community, and that it is the most childish ambition to covet dominion which adds to no man's comfort or security. To the great trading nation, to the great manufacturing nation, no progress which any portion of the human race can make in knowledge, in taste for the conveniences of life, or in the wealth by which those conveniences are produced, can be a matter of indifference. It is scarcely possible to calculate the benefits which we might derive from the diffusion of European civilisation among the vast population of the East. It would be, on the most selfish view of the case, far better for us that the people of India were well-governed and independent of us, than ill-governed and subject to us; that they were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broadcloth, and working with our cutlery, than that they were performing their salaams to English collectors and English magistrates,

¹ [Gavin Young], *An Inquiry into the Expediency of Applying the Principles of Colonial Policy to the Government of India & of Effecting An Essential Change in its Landed Tenures and Consequently in the Character of its Inhabitants*, 1822, p. 150. Cf. Crawford, *View of Present State*, p. 80.

² *Bengal Hurkaru*, 21 Oct. 1828 (editorial).

but were too ignorant to value, or too poor to buy, English manufactures. To trade with civilised men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages. That would indeed be a dotting wisdom, which, in order that India might remain a dependency, would make it an useless and costly dependency; which would keep a hundred millions of men from being our customers in order that they might continue to be our slaves.¹

For Macaulay and many of his contemporaries the political tie with India was by nature brittle and impermanent. His historical judgement taught him that all forms of government were transitory and superficial, and were at the mercy of deeper, irresistible forces which impelled human society. The true wisdom in politics lay in the constant adaptation of institutions to conform with the progress of these forces. To attempt to check them, to oppose an unyielding resistance to their advance, might meet with momentary success, but must ultimately result in a violent explosion as their pent-up pressure broke loose. The governing forces of history were generated by the constant tendency of intelligence and property to increase and diffuse themselves in an ever widening circle; and India could not be insulated from this action. If England were to profit from India she must develop her trade. Wealth and intelligence, at present the monopoly of the English, would then be diffused among the Indians, and political power must ultimately follow this process of diffusion. This was the law of history which Macaulay proclaimed to the Commons in the English Reform Bill crisis of 1831.² There was no cause for pessimism in contemplating the future. That the Indian people might one day demand and gain their independence was not a matter for regret. To civilize India was 'on the most selfish view of the case' the proper British policy, for it would create a wealthy and orderly society linked in the closest commercial connexion with England. When this stage had been reached, the political bond would become unimportant and wither away. While the sword won a barren and precarious hegemony, the advancement of a

¹ Speech of Macaulay in Charter Debate, 10 July 1833: Macaulay, *Complete Works*, vol. xi, pp. 583-4.

² Speech on Reform, 16 Dec. 1831: *ibid.*, pp. 490-5.

society in civilization was a lasting achievement. The permanent and most profitable form of conquest was that over the mind; and this was the species of conquest which Macaulay held out to the Commons, at the close of his great Charter speech of 1833, in a torrent of eloquence which one of the older members declared would 'console the young people for never having heard Mr. Burke'.

It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own. The sceptre may pass away from us. Unforeseen accidents may derange our most profound schemes of policy. Victory may be inconstant to our arms. But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverse. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.¹

Macaulay had said little that was new; everywhere his speech rings with ideas which the elder Charles Grant and Wilberforce had uttered nearly forty years before. And the instrument which he looked to for gaining this conquest over the mind of India was no different. The one sphere in which all Liberal opinion accorded the State a right of intervention was education.² By his entry into the education controversy of 1835, when he was a member of Council at Calcutta, Macaulay placed himself at the head of the school which, in Bentinck's phrase, saw general education as the panacea for the regeneration of India.³ Writing to his father in 1836, Macaulay said that it was his firm belief that, if the plans for English education were followed up, there would not be a single idolater among the respectable classes

¹ Speech of 10 July 1833: *ibid.*, pp. 585-6.

² Cf. his speech on education, 19 April 1847: *ibid.*, vol. xii, pp. 232 et seq.

³ Bentinck to Money (Mancy ?), 1 June 1834 (draft): Bentinck MSS.

in Bengal thirty years hence; that this would be effected without any efforts to proselytize; without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection.¹ In his *Education Minute* he left no doubt as to the aim of English education. Never was the doctrine of assimilation so baldly and crudely stated. Explaining his support for the 'diffusion' theory, which envisaged applying the Bell and Lancaster technique of instruction to the mass of the Indian population, Macaulay said the first object must be to raise up an English-educated middle class 'who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in colour and blood, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect'.² Macaulay was backed by the great bulk of the Calcutta mercantile community in his fight for English education. But its most ardent advocate was Macaulay's young brother-in-law, Charles Trevelyan, in whose person the fusion of the Evangelical and Radical outlook was most completely realized.³ In his pamphlet on the *Education of India* Trevelyan expounded in its fullest development that Liberal policy towards India, which Macaulay had outlined in his own speech of July 1833, and which was implicit in his reading of history. It is worth citing at length because it contains the kernel of the outlook of the Age of Reform, its passionate conviction that the ideals of altruism and the strongest claims of self-interest coincided. Substantially it represents the permanent Liberal attitude to India, which survived intact to the end of British rule, which, despite hesitations, was ready with an answer for Indian nationalism, and which has finally triumphed in our own time.

The existing connection between two such distant countries as England and India, cannot, in the nature of things, be permanent: no effort of policy can prevent the natives from ultimately regaining their independence. But there are two ways of arriving at this point. One

¹ Macaulay to his father, Zachary Macaulay, 12 Oct. 1836: G. O. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, 1908 edn., pp. 329–30.

² Macaulay, *Minute on Education*, 2 Feb. 1835. One of the few reasonably accessible books which reproduces this minute in its entirety is G. O. Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah*, 1864, pp. 410 et seq. Also *Selections from Educational Records*, Part I, 1781–1839, ed. H. Sharp, p. 107 et seq.

³ See note B, p. 323.

of these is through the medium of revolution; the other, through that of reform. In one, the forward movement is sudden and violent; in the other, it is gradual and peaceable. One must end in the complete alienation of mind and separation of interests between ourselves and the natives; the other in a permanent alliance, founded on mutual benefit and good-will. The only means at our disposal for preventing the one and securing the other class of results is, to set the natives on a process of European improvement, to which they are already sufficiently inclined. They will then cease to desire and aim at independence on the old Indian footing. . . . The political education of a nation is a work of time; and while it is in progress, we shall be as safe as it will be possible for us to be. The natives will not rise against us, we shall stoop to raise them; there will be no reaction, because there will be no pressure; the national activity will be fully and harmlessly employed in acquiring and diffusing European knowledge, and in naturalising European institutions. The educated classes, knowing that the elevation of their country on these principles can only be worked out under our protection, will naturally cling to us. . . . The change will thus be peaceably and gradually effected; there will be no struggle, no mutual exasperation; the natives will have independence, after first learning how to make good use of it; and we shall exchange profitable subjects for still more profitable allies. The present administrative connection benefits families, but a strict commercial union between the first manufacturing and the first producing country in the world, would be a solid foundation of strength and prosperity to our whole nation. If this course be adopted, there will, properly speaking, be no separation. A precarious and temporary relation will almost imperceptibly pass into another far more durable and beneficial. Trained by us to happiness and independence, and endowed with our learning and political institutions, India will remain the proudest monument of British benevolence; and we shall long continue to reap, in the affectionate attachment of the people, and in a great commercial intercourse with their splendid country, the fruit of that liberal and enlightened policy which suggested to us this line of conduct.¹