ORIEL AND THE WIDER WORLD

Oriel College, A History. ed. Jeremy Catto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp.444 - 475

'To conclude, *Guiana* is a Countrey that hath yet her Maydenhead, neuer sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not beene torne, nor the vertue and salt of the soyle spent by manurance, the graues haue not been opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld down out of their temples. It hath neuer been entred by any armie of strength, and neuer conquered or possesed by any Christian Prince.' Sir Walter Raleigh *The Discoverie of Guiana* (1596)[1]

There is a curious opposing symmetry in the careers of what are arguably Oriel's two most famous sons, both of whom made their names overseas. Raleigh and Rhodes each sought gold and dominion, but whilst the former was executed, disgraced, bankrupt and disappointed, the latter would not only enjoy fabulous riches and great political power during his short life, but would have his name perpetuated in that of an African colony for over seventy years after his death, whilst the trust he established and the scholarships it funds endure to this day. Conversely Raleigh's reputation has fared rather better than that of Rhodes in recent years, partly because the schemes of colonisation and plunder he proposed never came to fruition, but perhaps also because in his *History of the World* and *Discoverie of Guiana* he left a written legacy far more substantial than anything produced by Rhodes.

These two characters have something else in common: in neither case can we honestly claim to know of any profound influence which their education at Oriel had on their intellectual development and subsequent careers. We know almost nothing of Raleigh's time at Oriel save that he matriculated in 1572 as 'Rawley, W.', and that he borrowed a gown from a relation who was also there.[2] Perhaps it was at Oxford that he acquired some of that knowledge of Ancient History which he would later work into *The History of the World*. He is also supposed to have been taught mathematics by Thomas Harriot of St Mary Hall, who would later accompany Sir Richard Grenville as a navigator: it is hard to say much more.[3] In the case of Rhodes we are, of course, much better-informed, and there seems little doubt that he held Oriel in considerable affection, as having been prepared to admit him after his rejection by University College, and to allow

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[1] Sir Walter Raleigh 'The Discoverie of the Large, rich and bewtiful empyre of Guiana' Joyce Lorimer (ed.) *Sir Walter Ralegh's Discoverie of Guiana* (London 2006), 211

[2] See Shadwell *Registrum Orielense*, Vol.I, 42; 'Sir Walter Raleigh at Oriel' *Oriel Record* III, 3 (April 1919), .80-3; Cecil Emden 'Sir Walter Raleigh: his friends at Oriel' *Oriel Papers* (Oxford 1948), 9-21

[3] Richard Symonds 'Oxford & Empire' in HUO vii.689.

him to spread his residence over seven years before he finally obtained his pass degree.[4] That he remembered the college generously in his will (albeit in notoriously patronising terms, so far as the fellowship was concerned) is proof enough of this.[5] In the same document he expressed clearly what he thought most important about Oxford: namely that it was a residential university, stating that it was this consideration which impelled him to make his gigantic bequest there rather than to one of the Scottish universities where more practical subjects with greater relevance to his aims had more prominence in the curriculum.[6] However, Rhodes was twenty when he came up in 1873, and had already amassed a considerable fortune during the two years he had spent in South Africa: his path in life was clear. The reason it took him seven years to complete his degree was because he spent most of his time looking after his burgeoning mining empire on the Rand, and his interest was always in acquiring the social imprimatur of a spell at Oxford, rather than in any intellectual content.[7] As one of his contemporaries recalled:

> 'I remember him [Rhodes] well. We matriculated at the same time, but few of his contemporaries ever imagined that he would attain to such colossal greatness as he subsequently achieved. We did not conceive that this delicate and somewhat lackadaisical young man should ever play the most striking part in the history of modern British Imperial development. […] Some of us remember too, that when he returned from his first visit to South Africa, and had "struck diamonds", he used to carry some of the precious stones in a little box in his waistcoat pocket. On one occasion when he condescended to attend a lecture, which proved uninteresting to him, he pulled out his box and shewed the gems to his friends, and then it was upset, and diamonds were scattered on the floor, and the lecturer looked up and asking what was the cause of the disturbance received the reply, "it is only Rhodes and his diamonds." '[8]

Oriel cannot really claim to have spawned or fostered either Rhodes' business acumen or his Empire-building. This was something he learned in the harsher world of the Rand, and Oriel can take neither blame nor credit for his wider African legacy.

In light of what these examples tell us, I do not propose in this chapter simply to provide a check-list of the great and the good who, after passing through Oriel, went on to serve abroad, or indeed to try to record exhaustively all those who came to Oriel from

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[4] On Rhodes's Oxford career and connections see Philip Ziegler, *Legacy: Cecil Rhodes, the Rhodes Trust and Rhodes Scholarships* (Newhaven, CN 2008)

[5] 'And finally as the College authorities live secluded from the world, and so are like children as to commercial matters, I would advise them to consult my Trustees as to the investment of those various funds [£100,000]', 'Will of Mr Cecil Rhodes', *The Times* 5 April 1902.

[6] 'Colonial Scholarships at Oxford', *The Morning Post* 5 April 1902.

[7] Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, 'Rhodes, Cecil John (1853–1902)' ODNB, s.n.

[8] P. H. Ditchfield 'Famous Men of Oriel College' *Oriel Record* I, 3 (March1910), 163-4.

overseas. Most colleges in Oxford can boast such lists, often stretching back many centuries, and with a few exceptions (such as Balliol's connection with India) there is nothing particularly distinctive about them, no suggestion that the specific character or intellectual atmosphere of a college attracted more students from overseas, or impelled more of its graduates to seek their fortunes there.[9] Much more interesting is the question of whether knowledge acquired at Oriel would later be employed elsewhere, whether we can trace intellectual currents from their origin in the senior common room to their expression and application in Punjab, Rhodesia or the West Indies. Equally fascinating are the international networks of friendship, solidarity and support which were forged between fellows of the college, and amongst undergraduates with each other and with their tutors. It is only in more recent times that it becomes possible to look at these connections, which, overwhelmingly, took place within the framework of the British Empire. Accordingly although, as the example of Raleigh shows, the history of Oriel and the wider world begins when Britain began to expand overseas, and although by no means all the college's overseas links were those of Empire, it is the latter, and in particular the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which will occupy the central place in this chapter.

I

Sir John Seeley famously observed in 1883 that the 'general drift or goal of English history', since at least the late sixteenth century, was 'the extension of the English name into other countries of the globe, the foundation of Greater Britain'.[10] His plea to place imperialism and 'expansion' at the heart of English (we would now say British) history was adopted with enthusiasm in Oxford, and in many ways had already been anticipated there. Apart from Rhodes Oriel also played host to three of the nineteenth century's more important Imperial thinkers, namely Goldwin Smith, Regius Professor of Modern History from 1858 to 1865, his pupil James Bryce, Lord Bryce, and his competitor for the chair and eventual successor in 1892-94, James Anthony Froude.[11] Remarkable figures though they were, no great intellectual consistency can be found between the views of these three on Empire and Britain's place in the world, but they were often linked in unexpected ways. Smith was perhaps the original 'Little Englander', writing of the possibility that 'owing to the multitude of her useless dependencies, and

[9] As the diplomat Sir Cecil Spring-Rice (1859-1918) is supposed to have said to his old tutor at Balliol, 'one might as well talk of the P. & O. boats breeding Viceroys as of Eton breeding Governor-Generals: it was the only line for them to go by'. My thanks to S. J. D. Green for suggesting this comparison.
[10] Sir John Seeley *The Expansion of England* (London 1883),.8-9.
[11] Symonds 'Oxford and Empire', 694, 696-7.

the consequent dispersion and exhaustion of her forces, the power of England is beginning to decline.'[12]

Smith would continue to advocate the separation of colonial dependencies from Britain for the rest of his career, although he made a reluctant exception in the case of India, where he felt that despite the inherent evils of foreign rule, Britain's intentions and influence had on the whole been good.[13] While Goldwin Smith's historical contributions were slight, he played an important role in the campaign for university reform, and as a mentor for a generation of young radicals, many of whom would go on to political careers of a kind which eluded him.[14] He himself, after spending two years at the then newly-founded Cornell University (he became an admirer of American republicanism, though not of other aspects of its mass democratic culture) would in 1871 settle in Toronto, where he exercised a substantial (if occasionally controversial) influence over the nascent intellectual life of Canada.[15]

Goldwin Smith had written a highly critical review of J. A. Froude's *History of England* when it appeared in 1858, and the views of the two men also differed profoundly on the question of Empire. This was with the notable exception of Ireland, where both men opposed Home Rule. In Goldwin Smith's case this was purely on grounds of national security, but Froude, who was an undergraduate at Oriel from 1835 to 1840, had a genuine belief in the benefits of Anglo-Saxon and Protestant settlement, and in the maintenance of Empire.[16] He firmly rejected the liberal view, exemplified by Goldwin Smith, that most of Britain's colonies were no more than encumbrances to be shed as quickly as possible, famously writing that

> so far as our own colonies are concerned it is clear that the abandonment by the mother country of all pretence to interfere in their internal management has removed the only cause which could possibly have created a desire for independence. We cannot, even if we wish it ourselves, shake off connections who cost us nothing and themselves refuse to be divided. Politicians may quarrel; the democracies have refused to quarrel; and the result of the wide extension of

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[12] Goldwin Smith *The Empire. A Series of Letters published in the "Daily News" in 1862, 1863* (Oxford 1863), x.
[13] Goldwin Smith 'British Empire in India' *The North American Review* clxxxiii, 598, 7 Sept. 1906, 338-48.
[14] One judgement was that 'His chief weaknesses as a historian [were] a complete disregard of painstaking research into primary sources and a habit of violent partisanship' Elisabeth Wallace, 'Goldwin Smith on History', *Journal of Modern History* xxvi (1954), 220-232.
[15] Christopher A. Kent 'Smith, Goldwin (1823–1910)' ODNB, s.n.
[16] J. A. Froude *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 3 vols (London 1874); Goldwin Smith, *Irish History and Irish Character* (London 1862). See further D. McCartney, 'James Anthony Froude and Ireland: a historiographical controversy of the nineteenth century' *Historical Studies* viii (1971), 171–90.

> the suffrage throughout the Empire has been to show that being one the British people everywhere intend to remain one.'[17]

Instead Froude was an eloquent advocate of the Imperial federation of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, arguing that colonies should be used to absorb surplus population, tying them closer to the mother country and producing a more energetic race of agricultural colonists who would help to maintain Britain's position of power in the world against the rising challenge of the United States.[18] His advocacy of representative institutions, however, only extended to white inhabitants of the Empire, and not even to all of them. Notoriously he argued for the withdrawal from the West Indies of such limited concessions to self-government as existed:

> 'If you choose to take a race like the Irish or like the negroes whom you have forced into an unwilling subjection and have not treated when in that condition with perfect justice – if you take such a race, strike the fetters off them, and arm them at once with all the powers and privileges of loyal citizens, you ought not to be surprised if they attribute your concessions to fear, and if they turn again and rend you.'[19]

Elsewhere Froude was still more explicit about the need to maintain an authoritarian system of government akin to that in India (which he greatly admired) in any area with a population 'the enormous majority of whom are of an inferior race.'[20] With his evident disdain for the people and places he visited and his romantic Toryism, he would appear to have little in common with that pragmatic Liberal and 'eager traveller in many lands' James, Viscount Bryce, fellow of Oriel from 1862 to 1889, and Regius Professor of Civil Law for much of that period.[21] The latter exemplifies the mixture of literary history and active politics so characteristic of late nineteenth-century Britain, although arguably he never entirely fulfilled his ambitions as a politician. He did not become Foreign Secretary in the Liberal Government of 1905, losing out to the less well-travelled but cannier Grey, and instead the summit of his career came as ambassador in Washington from 1907 to 1913.[22] As a scholar he enjoyed greater distinction, becoming well-known as the leading British interpreter of American politics and society, producing numerous works on the subject over his long career.[23] His interests spanned the globe,

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[17] J. A. Froude *The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses* (London 1888), 2-3.
[18] A. F. Pollard 'Froude, James Anthony (1818–1894)', rev. William Thomas ODNB, s.n.
[19] Froude *The English in the West Indies*, 208-9.
[20] Ibid., 286-7.
[21] Ernest Barker, 'Lord Bryce' *EHR* xxxvii (1922), 221.
[22] Keith Robbins 'History and Politics: The Career of James Bryce' *Journal of Contemporary History* vii (1972), 37-52.
[23] His *magnum opus* was *The American Commonwealth*, 2 vols (London 1888).

however: as he himself said in 1914, on thanking Rudyard Kipling for an address to the Royal Geographical Society, he had 'a love for the Earth's surface, a desire to see every part of the Earth's surface, be it more beautiful or less beautiful.'[24] Bryce was an indefatigable traveller, visiting every continent apart from Antarctica, and, like many of his Oxford contemporaries, a keen mountaineer. He combined both enthusiasms while still a fellow of Oriel when he climbed Mount Ararat, the end point of a journey which took him through Russia from Kazan down the Volga, and then from Saratov via the Black Sea steppes to Transcaucasia, resulting in what was probably his best-known book of travels. Although Bryce compared the relations between the Russian state and its Muslim subjects favourably with the situation in British India or French Algeria, he considered the Russian regime to be cumbersome and backward.[25] On his return Bryce became well-known as a champion of the Armenians under Ottoman rule, maintaining a voluminous correspondence which ranged from lengthy descriptions of oppression, famine and suffering by Nerses, the Armenian orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, to begging letters from impecunious students.[26] Bryce's writings on Eastern Anatolia and its inhabitants indicated clearly his preference for a form of progressive, developmental Imperialism in place of supposedly 'stagnant' oriental rule, as he remarked that 'it is a sort of race between Persia and Turkey which shall govern the worst, and which shall do the least for the countries under their control'.[27]

Bryce was strongly influenced as an undergraduate by Goldwin Smith's high-minded radical Liberalism, reminiscing in his letters to him about 'all that I have been privileged to learn from you through your voice and your books, ever since I went to your lectures in the hall of University College', and the two men subsequently overlapped in Oriel senior common room for four years.[28] They corresponded from Smith's departure from Oriel for Cornell in 1866 until his death in 1910. At first this was only intermittent, but the outbreak of the Boer War produced a flurry of letters in which they denounced the origins and conduct of the war, and deplored the popular imperial fervour which it had produced. 'Who could believe that a nation which has a hereditary

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[24] Viscount Bryce and Rudyard Kipling 'Some aspects of travel: discussion' *The Geographical Journal* xliii (1914), 376.
[25] James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat: Being Notes of a Vacation Tour in the Autumn of 1876* (London 1878), 117-20.
[26] Bodleian Library MS Bryce 191 p.134, Nerses to Bryce, 16 January 1880; MS Bryce 192, pp. 163-4, Gregory Alexandrian to Bryce, 15 October 1884.
[27] James Bryce, 'Armenia and Mount Ararat', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* xxii (1877-8), 171.
[28] Bodleian Library MS Bryce 17 p.188, Bryce to Goldwin Smith, 19 November 1904 (copy).

House of Lords, and a State Church, and which holds in bondage three hundred millions of Hindoos, was crusading for political and religious equality in the Transvaal? […] This tidal wave of jingoism seems to have been set flowing by a sort of satiety of civilization. I shall not live to see it ebb, but you will.'[29]

Bryce's respect and affection for Smith are clear, and he shared many of his views, most notably a powerful dislike of the Ottoman Empire (echoing Gladstone's concern with the Christian victims of Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria and Armenia), of Joseph Chamberlain and 'jingoism', and of Froude, of whom Bryce wrote in response to an article on the latter by Smith in the *Atlantic Monthly* that 'what made his presence always so odious to me was the impression he conveyed not only of absolute indifference to truth but of a love of cruelty.'[30] Nevertheless it is not clear that Bryce can be regarded as Smith's political disciple. Where Smith opposed Home Rule for Ireland and argued for the severance of formal ties with the Dominions, Bryce supported the former and was one of the earliest politicians to advocate a form of Imperial federation amongst the white dominions of the Empire. However much they would both have resisted the comparison, Goldwin Smith and Bryce alike shared with Froude the belief, typical of all but a tiny minority of intellectuals at the time, that the despotic rule of Europeans was beneficial in regions 'where we deem that this native population is not qualified by its racial characteristics and by its state of education and enlightenment to work self-governing institutions'.[31] In one of his later works Bryce provided a more comprehensive justification for this inequality of rights between metropolis and colony which was central to nineteenth-century Liberal Imperialism.

> 'The truth is that, though a few intelligent men, educated in European ideas, complain of the despotic power of the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy, the people of India generally do not wish to govern themselves. Their traditions, their habits, their ideas, are all the other way, and dispose them to accept submissively any rule which is strong and which neither disturbs their religion and customs nor lays too heavy imposts upon them.
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> Here let an interesting contrast be noted. The Roman Emperors were despots at home in Italy almost as much, and ultimately quite as much, as in the provinces. The English govern their own country on democratic, India on absolutist principles. The inconsistency is patent but inevitable. It affords an easy theme for declamation when any arbitrary act of the Indian administration gives rise to complaints, and it may fairly be used as the foundation of for an argument

[29] Bodleian Library MS Bryce 16, p.108, Goldwin Smith to Bryce, 03 December 1899.
[30] Bodleian Library MS Bryce 17, p.194, Bryce to Goldwin Smith, 16 June 1906 (copy).
[31] James Bryce 'Some Difficulties in Colonial Government Encountered by Great Britain and how they have been met' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* xxx (1907), 19.

> that a people which enjoys freedom at home is specially bound to deal justly with and considerately with those subjects to whom she refuses a like freedom. But every one admits in his heart that it is impossible to ignore the differences which make one group of races unfit for the institutions which have given energy and contentment to another more favourably placed.'[32]

The language is more measured, but in this, if in no other way, Bryce's political vision of Empire resembled Froude's, in that it was based upon the permanent exclusion of the majority of its inhabitants from any say in the way they were governed, on the grounds of race.

Thus Oriel played its part in developing the ideologies of nineteenth-century imperialism, but it is still not clear whether, even in these prominent cases, the intellectual atmosphere of the college had a great deal to do with this. It seems unlikely that Oriel was a particularly congenial environment for Goldwin Smith during the eight years in which he held the Regius Chair: Oriel had rejected him for a fellowship in 1846. As one of the first 'railway dons', he was more active at the Athenaeum than in Oxford. Froude's early exposure to the Tractarians at Oriel produced a strong negative reaction which governed much of his subsequent career, but his specifically imperial interests were developed during his travels in Ireland, South Africa, Australasia and the West Indies in the 1870s and 1880s, in between his brief periods in the college. Only in the case of Bryce do we have a man who successfully straddled academic and political life during his twenty-seven years of fellowship, and in his relationship with Goldwin Smith we can see that at least some of his thinking on Empire and the wider world had its origins in Oriel senior common room.

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II

Leaving aside such prominent intellectual examples, what part did Orielenses play in Seeley's grand drama of expansion – was the creation of 'Greater Britain' reflected in the origins and destinations of the college's members? The early seventeenth century saw not only the foundation of the first successful Virginian settlement at Jamestown, but also the granting of the first Charter to the East India Company. In these tough, buccaneering, mercantile early years of British expansion, when trade was dominant and the majority of overseas settlers in the Americas and the West Indies were indentured labourers, the products of the English universities played only a very minor role, Raleigh

[32] James Bryce 'The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India' *The Roman and the British Empires* (Oxford 1914) pp.31-2

of course excepted. However the early years of the *Registrum Orielense* do yield a number of names of Orielenses whom we know to have pursued careers abroad. Among Raleigh's near contemporaries we find John Lane, who took his BA in 1564 and 'travelled with Father Parsons the Jesuit, became a Jesuit, and died in great sanctity in the University of Complutum (Alcala) in Spain, 1578'; Edward Unton, who took his BA in 1573 and was 'killed in Portugal, 1589, while serving in the expedition under Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, for the restoration of Don Antonio to the kingdom'; together with his brother Henry, who also took his BA in 1573 and was Ambassador to the King of France in 1591 and 1595 before dying overseas.[33] Between 1665 and 1737 nine American students matriculated at Oriel, of whom eight were Virginians. All were from Middlesex County, and four of them were Robinsons, related to John Robinson, Bishop of London, who paid for a range of buildings in the second quadrangle. From 1775 to 1800 there were another seven Oriel students from America.[34] In the nineteenth century the number of students from overseas matriculating gradually increased, although statistically they remained fairly insignificant until the influx of the Rhodes Scholars after 1903 (see table 1);[35] moreover almost all of them were British and educated at public schools. In 1819 there was just one matriculant born overseas, Jonathan Blenman Cobham from Barbados, who made his career as a clergyman in Britain. In 1828-9 there was none, but in 1838-9 there was a sudden increase to eight, a remarkable 18% of the total, from Malta, Canada, Jamaica, Nagpur, St Omer,[36] Florence, Mauritius and Barbados, although all had Anglo-Saxon names and most had careers in Britain. This seems to have been an unusual peak, as in 1848-9 there were three, one the son of an English merchant from Rio de Janeiro, one from Calcutta and one an American from Cincinnati. By 1878-9 the proportion of overseas matriculants had fallen, with two from Calcutta and one a German from St Petersburg. This only rose marginally in 1888-9, although that year saw a strengthening of Oriel's South African connection with the admission of Allan Webb, the son of the Bishop of Grahamstown,[37] and Arthur Scanlen, the son of Sir Thomas Scanlen, a prominent lawyer and member of parliament for the Cape Colony, who would later be responsible for drafting much of the earliest legislation

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[33] Shadwell *Registrum Orielense* i, 33, 41-2

[34] Cecil Emden 'Virginians at Oriel 1665-1737' *Oriel Papers* pp.77-82

[35] Oriel's initial share of Rhodes Scholars was a generous 11, but Balliol had 17. E. T. Williams 'The Rhodes Scholars' HUO vii.722

[36] This was Drummond Percy Chase, son of an army paymaster from Northamptonshire, elected Fellow in 1842 and the last Principal of St Mary Hall. Andrew Clark, 'Chase, Drummond Percy (1820–1902)', rev. M. C. Curthoys, ODNB, s.n.

[37] G. S. Woods, 'Webb, Allan Becher (1839–1907)', rev. Lynn Milne ODNB, s.n.

of the new colony of Rhodesia, at the invitation of his erstwhile protégé, Rhodes himself.[38] By 1898-9 this had increased to six, or 9% of the total, with two West Indians, one from Calcutta, one who lived in Biarritz and two Germans. Nevertheless, there was no very visible upward trend.

Table 1 *Orielenses born overseas* (Shadwell, *Registrum Orielense* ii)

Year	**1818/19**	**1828/9**	**1838/9**	**1848/9**	**1858/9**	**1868/9**	**1878/9**	**1888/9**	**1898/9**
Total Matriculants	46	37	44	39	47	36	56	51	69
No. born overseas	1	0	8	3	4	4	3	4	6
Percentage	2%	0%	18%	8%	8.5%	11%	5%	8%	9%

By the late eighteenth century a growing number of Orielenses had begun to make their careers overseas. This export of Oxford graduates was intimately linked with the growth and consolidation of Empire, but until the middle of the nineteenth century the overwhelming majority of university graduates who made careers in Britain's colonies were churchmen, whether missionaries or incumbents in the new dioceses and parishes which were being created in ever larger numbers east of Suez. As M. C. Curthoys has observed, it was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that the ancient universities began to play a prominent role in preparing men for other forms of public life. In the 1850s and 1860s Oxford's role in this respect seemed, if anything, to be diminishing. Before 1850 a majority of undergraduates who matriculated took holy orders, and among those who took degrees the figure was 75%. Very few entered the lay professions or government service.[39] The first signs of a significant change came after 1854, when the introduction of competitive examinations for the Indian Civil Service and the gradual elimination of patronage as the basis of appointments to the East India Company's civil service saw its 'capture' by university graduates, overwhelmingly from Oxford and Cambridge.[40] Oxford men gained a third of Indian appointments offered for competition between 1855 and 1859, and during the first fourteen years of the system they accounted for the largest number of recruits. However, the proportion of graduates entering the Home Civil Service remained small (not least because it adopted competitive

[38] Basil T. Hone, 'Scanlen, Sir Thomas Charles (1834–1912)' ODNB, s.n.
[39] M. C. Curthoys 'The Careers of Oxford Men', HUO vi.482-3.
[40] C. J. Dewey 'The Education of a Ruling Caste: The Indian Civil Service in the Era of Competitive Examination', *EHR* lxxxviii (1973), 263-5.

examinations much later), and the proportion of ordinands fell more slowly than is often realised. The 'shift to the professions' only really began in the 1870s, and the relative decline in the ecclesiastical character of Oxford graduates came only in the 1890s. Even in 1897 18% of them took holy orders, making them the single largest group.[41] Accordingly, although the Indian and colonial civil services were dominated by Oxford and Cambridge graduates at least during the period from 1890 to 1914, and careers in the Empire represented about 20% of the University Appointments' Committee's placements by the latter year, the clerical element remained important well into the inter-war period.

The broad picture of changing career paths of Oxford graduates, and the university's intimate connection with Empire has long been clear. Oriel largely conformed to those Oxford trends: from 1877, when over half of those who graduated from the college took holy orders, the proportion of clergy declined to 32% in 1887, 27% in 1895 and 22% in 1896.[42] While Shadwell's register is not comprehensive when it comes to the careers of non-clerical Oriel graduates, those whose careers he describes were fairly evenly divided between the bar, the army, and the home, Indian and colonial civil services.

The *Oriel Record* contained regular lists of Orielenses who had taken up overseas postings, news of their honours and achievements, and occasionally accounts of their experiences. The very first issue, in 1909, noted that P. C. Lyon, Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal had been made C.I.E. and was a member of the Legislative Council, that H. G. Stokes I.C.S. was Officiating Assistant Secretary in the Home Department, Government of India, that R. E. Holland of the I.C.S. Political Department was H.M. Consul and Political Agent at Muscat, H. J. Anderson Inspector of Schools in the Cape Colony, and that G. Garlick was now Professor of Philosophy at the Aligarh Muslim University in the N.W. Provinces of India. 'In addition to the above, R. B. Smith has left to take up his appointment in the Civil Service of India, R. K. Winter, T. F. Sandford and G. A. Fuller-Maitland have received similar appointments in the Soudan, Rhodesia and British East Africa; A. Wimbush and V. N. Forbes have entered the Indian Forest Service.'[43] The issue also contained a fulsome article by D. R. Seth-

[41] Curthoys 'The Careers of Oxford Men', 489-90, 503.
[42] Shadwell *Registrum Orielense* ii.
[43] *Oriel Record* I, 1, February 1909, 3.

Smith on the bright prospects for European settlement in British East Africa.[44] This indicates a lively interest in Empire which was typical of Edwardian Oxford, and which would be maintained well into the 1930s. The activities of a regular stream of colonial bishops and clergymen, district commissioners and assistant under-secretaries were enshrined in the pages of the *Record*, overwhelmingly within the framework of the empire, with occasional intriguing exceptions - 'Mr Michaelopoulos, who has returned to Oxford to complete his work in Honour Moderations, is, we understand, not only a scholar of Oriel, but Assistant Governor of Smyrna.'[45] – presumably a short-lived appointment, given the disastrous failure of the Greek *Megali Idea*. Of the 193 subscribers to the *Oriel Record* in 1921, twenty-six, or 13.5%, were working overseas, in regions as diverse as Mesopotamia, Zanzibar, Assam and Connecticut.[46] Among these was Oriel's only genuine proconsular figure of this period, Robert Chalmers, Baron Chalmers, who rose from humble beginnings to be Governor of Ceylon from 1913 to 1919, and who was also the editor of a number of important Buddhist texts.[47] Pockets of Orielenses existed all over the world. One of the densest concentrations, appropriately enough, was in Johannesburg and Cape Town:

> 'In or near these two centres are a great many of the old Oriel men now in South Africa. At Capetown the *doyen* of them is Professor William Ritchie, a year junior to the Provost, who is the senior professor of Capetown University. The first Rhodes Scholar, Frank Reid, is a rising barrister; his brother Norman, the Rugby full-back, is a solicitor. H.J. Anderson is chief inspector of training colleges for the Cape Province, and is contemplating the formation of an Oriel Society in South Africa. H.A. Thomson is a Cowley Father, and is at present stationed at Capetown. Dallas and Shacksnovis are also there: the latter writes most Saturdays in the *Cape Argus*. W. M. Smail is professor at Rhodes University College, Grahamstown: A. Wagner is lecturer at the University of Johannesburg, and R McKerron is professor there. K. McLachlan, of the Community of the Resurrection, is teaching at St John's College, a public school at Johannesburg, and F.F.C. Lewis is at Diocesan College, Rondebosch. I was lucky enough to meet J. S. Lister, who is a Presbyterian minister in the eastern part of the Cape Province: he does more without sight than most men do with their eyes to help them. At Bloemfontein I was kindly entertained by Mr Justice McGregor, whose daughter is entered for Somerville in October. Time and weather – it was very hot, and we have no conception of an African sun – prevented me from going to the Transkei, or I should have seen L. W. Mallward, now Dean of Umtata, and I had to abandon the idea of Rhodesia and seeing Godfrey King. Unfortunately I was unable to meet C. T. Blakeway in Johannesburg where he is an advocate in large practice.'[48]

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[44] D. R. Seth-Smith, 'British East Africa' *Oriel Record* I, 1, February 1909, 31-3.
[45] *Oriel Record* III, 5, March 1920, 129-30.
[46] 'List of Subscribers' *Oriel Record* IV, 1, March 1921, 25-8.
[47] G. C. Peden, 'Chalmers, Robert, Baron Chalmers (1858–1938)', ODNB s.n.
[48] 'Oriel in South Africa' *Oriel Record* IV, 13, June 1927, 394.

However, with the notable exception of a strong link with the Sudan Political service, the college was not remarkable in the extent or proportion of its overseas links: it is remarkable, however, in having somehow preserved in its archive a source which allows us to explore those links in extraordinary detail. As Richard Symonds has observed, 'the most comprehensive impression of how Oxford men viewed their work in the I.C.S., colonial and other services of the Empire may be found in the remarkable correspondence of Phelps of Oriel between 1877 and 1936.'[49]

III

The Reverend Lancelot Ridley Phelps (1853-1936, fellow 1877, provost 1914-1929) was second only to Jowett as a mentor and guide for undergraduates who would go on to imperial careers. This was partly in his role as tutor to, at a conservative estimate, a third of Oriel's undergraduate body at any one time, but also because, as the university's most popular lecturer on political economy, he taught most of the ICS probationers when they were following their preliminary course of instruction at Oxford.[50] His personal enthusiasm for the college's imperial mission is revealed in (presumably unwelcome) observations in some of his occasional letters to Bryce: at the 1899 Gaudy 'Rhodes made a remarkably fine speech, which I need not say struck a chord', while in 1914 'the late Bishop of Natal, Baynes, was good on the Imperial mission of Oriel as centre of the Rhodes Trust.'[51] Anecdotes concerning "The Phelper" abounded – a hugely-bearded man who wore a straw hat in winter, lunched daily off a rice pudding, and under whose window undergraduates would gather in the mornings to hear him say, 'Be a man, Phelps, be a man!' before he entered his cold bath.[52] Many were also invited to the reading parties which he organised at High Force, on the Tees, and his influence upon them was profound, long-lasting, and commemorated in what must be the largest collection of letters of its kind anywhere in Oxford.[53] As his obituary in the *Oriel Record* put it:

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[49] Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire* (London 1986), 199.
[50] David Ross, 'Phelps, Lancelot Ridley (1853–1936)', rev. M. C. Curthoys, ODNB, s.n.
[51] Bodleian Library MS Bryce 188, p.157, Phelps to Bryce 24 June 1899; p.174, Phelps to Bryce 28 June 1914.
[52] This last expression has entered into legend – so much so that it has been used by philosophers as a classic example of self-exhortation to do that which one already knows to be right: J. D. Mabbott, 'True and False in Morals' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* , n.s. xlix (1948-9), 139-40. See further C. J. Martin 'Arthur Edwin Boycott. 1877-1938' *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society* ii, 7, January 1939, 562.
[53] They occupy ten large boxes in the Oriel Archives, OCA PRO 2/44/1, *Phelps Letters.*

> 'It is hardly too much to say that for generation after generation of Oriel men, Phelps *was* the College. […] what Phelps achieved is most of all bound up with his friendships and his influence in the lives of other people. Of this he was probably conscious himself, for he used to keep every letter he received, explaining that if his life were ever written, his biographer would best understand him from his effect on the outlook of others. His own correspondence was vast; and he did not scribble notes, he wrote letters, in the style of the epistolary age, not even excluding the long esses. All through the war he poured out his letters to members of Oriel on all the fronts; they came as regularly as the rations and were quite as eagerly looked for. These were the link between us and the College, between us and the sane enduring world.'[54]

As Arnold Forster wrote from the S.S. *City of Benares* on his way back to the Sudan in 1910 'Why are you so good a correspondent? You make one feel most frightfully ashamed…'[55] It is not clear whether Phelps only wrote to former pupils serving overseas, or whether he only kept those letters from far afield, but the collection today consists of seven boxes of letters from India, two from Africa, and one from 'miscellaneous' Imperial possessions such as the West Indies, Hong Kong and South-East Asia, containing hundreds and hundreds of replies to the letters he poured out across the world. The predominance of Indian correspondence is partly because service there was far more prestigious than anywhere else in the Empire and attracted many more Oxford graduates, but also reflects the fact that many of the letters are not necessarily from Orielenses, but also from Old Carthusians (Phelps was an OC himself and a Governor of Charterhouse) and above all from the many ICS probationers whom he had taught political economy. The African letters are almost all from Orielenses, and in particular from individuals in the Sudan, where with Phelps's encouragement a remarkably close link emerged between the college and the Sudan Political Service. The Indian and African letters also cover somewhat different timespans, owing to the relatively late development of a significant British presence in Africa. The earliest African letters (from the Cape, unsurprisingly) date from 1897, while Phelps was already receiving letters from India in 1883, just six years after he was elected a fellow. In many ways it is the African correspondence which is most interesting. This is partly because almost all of it comes from Orielenses, but also because the African letters cover a broader cross-section of colonial life, including teachers, planters, soldiers, merchants, lawyers and bankers as well as civil servants. Sadly it is impossible to do real justice to this remarkable collection within the constraints of this chapter, but as an insight into the mentality of Orielenses serving overseas, and of the links forged at the college which

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[54] F. R. Barry 'L.R.P.' *Oriel Record* VII, 4, January 1937, 161-2.
[55] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i.157-60, Forster to Phelps, 12 August 1910.

continued to bind them to each other and to their old tutor, it deserves some detailed analysis.

The letters vary widely in content and length, but not in the affection which they express for the college, and for Phelps himself, whose habits and eccentricities are frequently described with fond nostalgia: 'Do you still smoke 17 different pipes in succession?' enquired R. F. McCall from Johannesburg in 1929.[56] Correspondents kept him updated not only on their professional careers, but also their personal lives, indeed the two are often hard to separate. One such was E. Saxon, who wrote from Sokoto in Northern Nigeria to tell Phelps that he had fallen in love, meant to get married and consequently felt he had to resign from the service.[57] Certain themes recur frequently: enquiries as to the college's sporting record, requests for intellectual advice and assistance, and political debate and commentary. While Phelps himself was at the radical end of the spectrum of liberal opinion (he was best-known as an active social reformer and a member of the Royal Commission on the poor laws), the opinions expressed by his students were normally conservative, not to say reactionary. As A. R. Wise wrote from Kenya after the Labour party first formed a coalition government in 1924:

> 'I am afraid that I am unable to share your regret that there is too much blue and not enough red in our present government but I am entirely with you in regarding the political experiment with misgiving though possibly from a different cause. However it is best that Labour should have its first innings on a wicket so sticky that they depend solely on the charity of the bowler for its duration and success.'[58]

Some of them made direct connections with what they had learnt from Phelps on the subject of political economy and poor law reform. L. M. Heaney wrote from Government House, Dar-es-Salaam, in 1932

> 'I came out here two years ago with some qualms as I thought empire building might be over strenuous and rather tedious. I have been agreeably surprised […] As I remember our Sunday afternoon walks to Cowley Road workhouse, I note that there is over here no Poor Law problem! No one need starve for in most places a native can find a fellow tribesman whose duty it is to maintain him and give him shelter. The European government will, I suppose, eventually destroy this happy state of affairs by its gospel of hard work and by placing the native's domestic economy on a cash basis, giving him money for his labour, and making him eventually perhaps a "wage slave". But that is as yet hundreds of years away.'[59]

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[56] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii p.291, McCall to Phelps 01 November 1929.
[57] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.459-64, Saxon to Phelps, 29 March1920.
[58] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.592-8, Wise to Phelps, 22 March 1924.
[59] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.238-41, Heaney to Phelps 21 January 1932.

Some wrote just one letter, others continued to correspond for years, or wrote again after lengthy intervals: Phelps's election as provost in 1914 brought a shower of congratulatory epistles in which his old students also brought him up to date with their latest movements; he answered every one of them individually. Leonard Frederick Morshead was perhaps Phelps's most prolific correspondent: he wrote him twenty-one letters from India between 1890 and 1924, including one from Bhagalpur in which he asked for Phelps's verdict on Kipling's *Departmental Ditties*, which he had been reading with great enjoyment.[60] Sir John Hose, a former probationer who had a distinguished career in the ICS, was not far behind with nineteen letters between 1887 and 1912.[61] Alongside correspondence from students and clerical colleagues there were occasional letters from proud or anxious mothers, of which the most peculiar was undoubtedly that from Winifred Warner in South Africa, who appears to have been suffering from a form of religious mania, sending a letter full of heavy underlinings which attributed messiah-like qualities to her son Hugh.[62] Hugh himself, a member of the first Eight whose own letters to Phelps were bluff and cheery, would no doubt have been mortified by this.[63] A striking aspect of much of the early correspondence, when Phelps was still a relatively young man, is the irreverence and familiarity with which his former students felt they could address him. In 1887 A. R. Bonas wrote from Satara in the Central Provinces of British India that

> 'I've had no pig-sticking as yet, & am not likely to have any hereabouts, as there is no country for pig near here; […] I stayed in Bombay a week with some friends of my people, & had a rattling time. Tennis every morning & most evenings; visits to the bazaar, the Yacht Club & other places where the Bombay loafer most does congregate; sitting about reading all day in the verandah, smoking splendid cigars at about four rupees per hundred (think of that, weeds at 6/- per hundred!, which would cost 40/- in England). Of course it's all Indian tobacco.'[64]

Similarly in 1905, writing from the Sudan Club in Khartoum, W. H. Evans, (who would die in an air-crash in 1913 and whose letters Phelps consequently kept separately),

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[60] OCA PRO 2/44/1 India i pp.458-63, Morshead to Phelps 21 September 1890; For Morshead's other letters see India i pp.379-83, 608-13, 664-9; India ii pp.129-34, 237-9; India iii pp.87-94, 97-102, 109-12, 132-5, 151-7, 177-80, 202; India iv pp.10-13, 48-53, 162-6, 232-5, 274-9, 336-43, 408-11, 423-6; India vi pp.87, 129; India vii, pp.23-7.
[61] OCA PRO 2/44/1. For Hose's letters see India i pp.47-54, 78-81, 120-5, 139-48, 183-6, 250-3, 337-342, 420, 676 – 9; India ii pp.85-9, 185-90, 374-9, 486-93; India iii pp.32-5, 167-72; India iv, pp.14-17; India v pp.240, 113, 118-21, 158-61.
[62] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.547-8, Winifred Warner to Phelps 18 July 1925.
[63] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.541-2, Hugh Warner to Phelps 21 July 1924.
[64] OCA PRO 2/44/1 India i pp.33-42, Bonas to Phelps 4 March 1887.

felt no embarrassment at recalling an encounter with Dr Shadwell, Phelps's predecessor as provost,

> 'Very many thanks for your letter which reached me on Nov 6th at the precise hour of 7.35 and helped to divert my attention from bad fish & smelly kidneys […] I am glad that they made Mr or Dr Shadwell Provost because he once gave me a dinner that I shall take long to forget: but at the same time I owe him a grudge on account of that same dinner. I arrived rather early and sat down very shy to talk to him HE said "Do you know Reynolds of Oriel"! I said no, not remembering that I had as a matter of fact met him. He said "Don't know Reynolds!" Then as an afterthought "oh! Well, of course you wouldn't be in quite the best set in the College".'[65]

He followed this up by offering to send Phelps a Rhinoceros-hide whip. Dennis Gye clearly thought Phelps would be interested to learn that 'I find that I am unique in Egypt in one respect if no other; namely that I continue to smoke American tobacco and have never taken to the Egyptian cigarette. I roll my own cigarettes. However I have now returned vigorously to pipe smoking and have routed out my old Oxford meerschaums.'[66] The pre-First World War letters are rife with observations of this kind, trivial in themselves, but offering insights into both the social mores of the time and the close bond which existed between Phelps and many of his former pupils.

IV

A darker but unsurprising side of the letters is their commonplace, casual and persistent racism. This ranged from the patronising of non-Europeans as 'children' to full-blooded biological determinism. 'The native is a beast', wrote John Hose from Gorakhpur in 1888, and such sentiments were not unusual.[67] Forty-five years later W. S. Baldock wrote from Tanganyika that 'The native mind is not a pleasant thing to study & none of the finer thoughts are known or understood by them. Many of them suffer from physical deformities…'[68] The following year A. R. Wise chose to devote most of his letter from the Nairobi Club in neighbouring Kenya to a vitriolic disquisition on 'the worst races of the Indian Empire' who flocked to the colony, describing them as 'naturally dirty', 'untruthful' and 'cowardly'; 'When actually face to face with an officer, he cringes to such an extent as almost to make one physically sick.'[69] Such views were quite common amongst Orielenses who had settled in African colonies, though tempered in

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[65] OCA MPP/E 8/1 *Letters from W H B Evans*, 9 November 1905.
[66] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i p.203, Gye to Helps, 21 February 1907.
[67] OCA PRO 2/44/1 India i p.125*v*, Hose to Phelps, 10 June 1888.
[68] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.17-20, Baldock to Phelps, 31 May 1923.
[69] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.592-8, Wise to Phelps, 22 March 1924.

the case of those races considered more 'martial' (such as the Masai) by a respect for their supposedly greater physical courage.[70] The milder but unconsciously patronising attitude of Oswald Bosanquet (later resident at Indore and Bhopal), was perhaps more typical of most civil servants:

> 'You ask what is the general opinion about the Imperial service and the changes in our service out here. I think men don't object to it much. Certainly they don't mind the natives being put into higher posts. The native B.A. of the present day is not a bad creature. Of course socially he is worth less. His talk is limited to "shop". All native officials who come & call on one talk "shop". Of course, it is the only interest we at present have in common. […] People are pretty agreed that it won't do to put the natives into the higher executive posts such as Collectors: they will do very well as judges, as they are almost entirely as honest as Englishmen & law is a thing they can thoroughly understand.'[71]

Bosanquet could accept educated Indians participating (to a limited extent) in a modern civil service and legal system, but in Africa there was a widespread assumption amongst British officials that the natives were still too under-developed for such responsibilities, and that instead they would benefit from a more paternalistic, devolved approach. S. J. Hogben, an education officer in Sokoto in Northern Nigeria, wrote in 1921 that 'The natives here are dear old things but always half asleep and at least 3000 years behind us in civilisation. Nothing worries them, and nothing will persuade them that a job of work is worth doing properly. They are quite happy with their modest wants and ambitions: I wonder what good our "bettering" will do – we profess a desire to make them better Hausas and to raise their standard of living.'[72]

According to another Nigerian Orielensis, Duncan Stewart, Hogben was the man 'who taught the sons of the Emir of Katouma to play polo, and to play it so well.'[73] The anecdote reveals Frederick Lugard's ideal of Indirect Rule in action, and it was another recurring theme in Phelps's correspondence, as District Officers sang the praises of a system which (so they believed) helped to clothe alien rule in local colours, and to preserve both social stability and the best aspects of local culture.[74] Francis Wilkinson wrote from Katsina in Kano Province of Northern Nigeria that

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[70] Although W. S. Baldock wrote that 'the Masai are a picturesque people that wander about with 8 foot spears & a few skins, otherwise the Masai are a very degraded type…' OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.17-20, Baldock to Phelps, 31 May 1923; On the peculiarities of British 'Martial Race' theory see David Omissi *The Sepoy and the Raj. The Indian Army 1860-1940* (Basingstoke 1994), 10-46.
[71] OCA PRO 2/44/1 India i pp.103*v*-104, Bosanquet to Phelps, 13 May 1888.
[72] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i p.249-50, Hogben to Phelps 21 November 1921.
[73] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.489-91, Stewart to Phelps, 4 June 1929.
[74] For the classic statement of the theory of indirect rule see Frederick Dealtry Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London 1922). Lugard took the princely states of India as a model for his system of

> 'Just here we have about the most enlightened Emir in Nigeria. He has been to England twice and to Mecca once. He knows very well which side his bread is buttered, and got the medal for meritorious service for First Class Chiefs among the First. So there's no trouble about enforcing our rule.'[75]

Writing from Darfur in the Sudan, John Mackrell was still more explicit about the need to preserve as much as possible of what he saw as traditional 'tribal discipline':

> 'It is this tribal discipline which the Government regards as the key to the peaceful development of the whole country. For tribes who have lost their tribal soul, there is small chance of salvation. The people are idle, irreligious, discontented and without self-respect. They have no unity and no leader. They readily absorb the undesirable parts of European civilisation, and learn to despise the honourable customs of their fathers.
>
> To the tribe which has preserved its tribal discipline intact, all things are possible. Its characteristics are an integrity and straightforwardness, which make easy its dealings with other sincere people.
>
> It is the aim of the Government to consolidate the position of the great tribal heads, and to pursue a policy of gradual devolution of its powers on these chiefs. Darfur was, until the entry of the Government, ruled by a Sultan, who was compelled to struggle continuously to keep the five or six great tribes under his personal control. These tribes had their own hereditary chiefs, who looked on the Sultan as foreigner and a usurper of their powers and privileges. Their resistance to his rule was stiffened by barbarity and oppression. With the coming of the present Government they were not slow to appreciate the great improvement of their lot. The pacification of the country, accomplished with very little fighting, brought a security to person and property which had never before been known. The removal of the Sultan also strengthened the position of these half-dozen big tribal heads, to whom the people now looked as their natural leaders. Very soon, the Government was able to give them some official recognition […] we shall see everything that is best in their traditional government, operating in a state of security which it could never have known without our intervention. What a reward if we see Darfur enjoy a Golden Age as a result of our labours!'[76]

Mackrell's conviction that colonial rule was benevolent and paternalistic is hardly surprising, but what is striking is the degree to which he presents it as 'restoring' earlier rights. It is a fundamentally conservative vision, and a far cry from the developmental or 'civilising' idea of colonial rule.[77] An earlier generation of Sudanese administrators was less sentimental: W. B. Evans, for whom Phelps seems to have had a particular affection, wrote in 1906 that 'We boast at home of our justice, clemency, equal rights for

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indirect rule through the Muslim emirs of Northern Nigeria; For a contemporary academic exploration of the idea see Margery Perham, 'Some Problems of Indirect Rule in Africa' *Journal of the Royal African Society* xxxiv (1935), 1-23.

[75] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.575-6, Wilkinson to Phelps, 12 January 1925.

[76] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.307-17, Mackrell to Phelps, 11/09/1930.

[77] It thus chimes well with David Cannadine's contention that in most colonies the British saw the restoration, preservation and fossilisation of supposedly 'traditional' hierarchies as a key aim of their rule, and the best guarantor of stability. David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism. How the British saw their Empire* (London 2001), 58-70.

inhabitants etc, but the only thing that exists is justice untempered with mercy.'[78] Two years later he complained from Kassala in the Sudan that:

> 'One reads of brutal floggings in the Daily Mail if you allow it inside your house but you are not told at the same time that the black is about as insensible to the lash as a brick wall and that in many places it has fallen into disuse because it is such a futile form of punishment. Any man who says that the black is the equal of the white is a fool, and anyone who acts on that hypothesis is a criminal.'[79]

None of this suggests that Oriel can have been a terribly welcoming place for non-white students in the decades leading up to World War II. By the 1920s the college had admitted a number of Indian students, as the *Oriel Record* rather coldly observed: 'we note the addition to the college of three Indian students, to whom, we have no doubt, a hearty welcome has been given. But Freshmen, of whatever nationality, must not expect to be at once 'hand and glove' [*sic*] with everybody in the College.'[80]

It seems likely that Phelps's own welcome was rather warmer than this suggested, and that he did not share the more extreme racist sentiments in some of the letters he received. In the 1920s he received a number of letters from Indian students who appeared to remember him with much affection. In 1924 Srinivasa Raghunatha Rao, an Orielensis who worked for the Forestry Department in Guntur, wrote that

> 'There are three or four Oriel men in this presidency. Mr C. R. Armstrong who is on the same Railway as my brother, was good enough to invite me to tea when I was in Madras in July. He made v. kind enquiries about all the Dons and his college. Sir Arthur Knapp whom you know intimately I am happy to say is in excellent health & at the head of my department. Whenever I meet him, he makes kind enquiries about you.
>
> I was very pleased to hear of Sen getting a first and to hear of the successes of Ghose, & Imam. Though it is only about ten months since I left England, I wish I could get back there this minute!!'[81]

Arguably a keen sense of class hierarchy and social privilege was at least as important a theme as race in the Phelps correspondence. In Denis Gye's letters from Egypt uneasiness at the effects of foreign birth and climate on those of English descent mingled with a straightforward sense of superior upbringing:[82]

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[78] OCA MPP/E 8/1, Evans to Phelps, 24 February 1906.
[79] OCA MPP/E 8/1, Evans to Phelps, 27 January 1908.
[80] *Oriel Record* IV, 1, March 1921, 5.
[81] OCA PRO 2/44/1, India vii pp.43-4, Rao to Phelps, 8 December 1924 .
[82] On changing ideas of the effect of climate on national or racial character in the nineteenth century see Mark Harrison *Climates and Constitutions. Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India, 1600-1850* (Delhi 1999).

> 'Now the agents of the National Bank are mostly recruited from Levantines; i.e. Englishmen born in Beyrout or Smyrna, and they don't seem to have the same healthy characteristics of sport and cleanliness. If there is any truth in the adage that Cleanliness is next to Godliness, I can only suppose that my fellow lodger us on the extreme borders of heathendom!
>
> When I first arrived I found everything in an extreme state of dirt, so much so that even my native cook (native cooks are not as a rule over-particular) objected to using such a kitchen. However I took the law into my own hands and now things are more presentable. I do not complain, except in cases in which my own personal comfort is threatened, as it is unpleasant to have rows with a man you are compelled to live with. When, however, I counted 14 consecutive days during which he had not had a bath, I enquired with some sarcasm if he had given up baths altogether. He replied quite casually "No, only now it is too cold!" […] I have lately made the pleasant discovery that he keeps no tooth-brush. I believe that these Levantine people object to Englishmen who have been born at home because they are so stuck up. I think that it is not a case of where you were born but of how you were brought up.'[83]

Gye himself, however, could have fallen foul of the prejudices of many of his fellow-Orielenses because he worked in commerce rather than administration, a 'box-wallah'.[84] It was one of the great paradoxes of the British Empire that, whilst it was founded on commerce and, fundamentally, as a money-making enterprise, the 'prefects' who emerged from the public schools and ancient universities to run it were supposed to have a contempt for the supposed crassness and materialism of the commercial bourgeoisie inculcated in them from the earliest days of their schooling.[85] In practice there were limits to this: large numbers of public schoolboys would enter the more 'gentlemanly' branches of capitalism, most notably banking (as did Gye). By the late nineteenth century financial, landed, professional and service interests would increasingly be blended within the ruling elite of the British Empire.[86] Nevertheless, the rhetorical hostility towards 'vulgar commerce' remained. Phelps's lectures in political economy seem to have done nothing to dispel this most characteristic of imperial prejudices, and indeed if one letter is to be believed, he shared them: 'I never forget your disgust' wrote J. C. Penney of the Cairo City Police in 1927 'when Lagden (I think it was) gave up being an administrator and became a brewer!'[87] From the Sudan M. H. V. Fleming condemned

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[83] OCA PRO 2/44/1, Africa i p.203, Gye to Phelps, 21 February 1907.
[84] On the often bitter political divisions which existed between the official and non-official British in India (where this contemptuous term was coined) see Alexander Morrison, 'White Todas. The Politics of Race and Class amongst European Settlers on the Nilgiri Hills ca.1860-1914', *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* xxxii (2004), 54-85.
[85] Bernard Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists. Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford 2004), 61.
[86] P. J. Cain & A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (London 1993), 29-37, 116-131.
[87] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii p.378, Penney to Phelps, n.d. [early 1927].

'the counter-jumping Imperialism which Wells wrote against in "Joan and Peter":[88] for him it was a nobler calling, whose purpose was civilization rather than the sordid business of trade, something also visible in R. K. Winter's wistful remark that 'The Red Sea used to be a delectable Province, but is now made hideous by vulgar commerce – since Manchester discovered how good is our cotton.'[89] For T. Sandford, fighting an uphill battle to protect African mineworkers from excessive exploitation by the settlers of Northern Rhodesia, Phelps's letters 'bring, as it were, a breath of fresh air into this atmosphere of money-grubbing and materialism.'[90] His critique of white settlers was highly characteristic of the British Empire's 'Guardians', a mixture of high-minded but condescending humanitarianism and class prejudice 'The class of settler is not very high in many cases & their one idea seems to be to do down their boys […] I cannot tell you what a heart breaking job it is sometimes on a station like this with many settlers in the district. If only they were men of education matters would be easier, but 75% are absolute adventurers from their youth.'[91] However, in Kenya (which attracted a rather better class of settler than Northern Rhodesia) Orielenses were to be found on both sides of the divide. Arthur Walford, a member of the education department of the Kenyan Civil Service, bemoaned the failure of the 1932 Kenya land commission to redress the wrongs done to the Kikuyu and other tribes and protect their land from further encroachment by European settlers, but also wondered what the opinion of H. E. Schwartze, another Kenyan Orielensis, would be 'After all he too is a member of a public school & a University, but also an unofficial member of Legislative Council & spokesman for the settlers […] it is incidents such as this which seem to make the ultimate surrender of the Empire inevitable, if not desirable.'[92] Perhaps conscious that Phelps might regard him as *declassé* because he was not in public service, J. Harper made a point of stressing the pedigree with a public school and Oxford education supposedly conferred when he wrote from Kenya defending the white settlers against metropolitan attacks: 'assuming you have noticed – which I hope you have not – the gratuitous and malignant slanders lately directed against this Colony (which, ironically, is peopled almost exclusively by public school and varsity men – a class less likely to merit these slanders

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[88] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.149-152, Fleming to Phelps, 13 April 1930. He is referring to a passage in H. G. Wells, *Joan and Peter. The Story of an Education* (London 1918), 222-5, in which one of the protagonists denounces the supposedly 'Teutonised' New Imperialism espoused by Joseph Chamberlain.
[89] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii p.591, Winter to Phelps, 26 March 1925.
[90] OCA PRO 2/44/I Africa ii pp.438-443, Sandford to Phelps, 18 February 1910.
[91] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.448-50, Sandford to Phelps, 15 February 1911.
[92] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.534-8, Walford to Phelps, 22 January 1933; see Michael S. Coray, 'The Kenya Land Commission and the Kikuyu of Kiambu' *Agricultural History* lii (1978), 179-193; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged. Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the end of Empire* (London 2005), 10.

than any in the history of the Empire) – I am sure you will have discounted them at their value.'[93]

Another major group of overseas Orielenses were the missionaries and churchmen, although it is striking how few of the overseas letters are from Phelps's fellow clergymen. It is perhaps a reflection of how far he was from sharing in the proselytising impulse that R. F. McNeile in Cairo appeared to feel no embarrassment in writing to him of missionaries that 'Lord Cromer made it a rule never to have one of the breed inside his house – unless they inserted themselves – even at formal functions for fear of raising a Pan-Islamic cry!! […] I have not yet been here sufficiently long to be seriously tarred with the brush of aggressive piety.'[94]

Nevertheless, Oriel continued to play an important role in missionary enterprise well into the twentieth century. In 1920 the *Oriel Record*'s editorial proudly proclaimed 'Our frontispiece is from a photograph of the Oriel Bishops at the recent Lambeth Conference. From left to right they are as follows: -

The Right Rev. A. Hamilton Baynes, late Bishop of Natal
The Right Rev. A. J. May, Bishop of North Rhodesia.
The Most Rev. E. A. Parry, Archbishop of the West Indies
The Right Rev. A. J. Doull, Bishop of Kootenay, Canada.
The Right Rev. G. W. Kennion, Bishop of Bath and Wells.
The Right Rev. E. D. Shaw, Bishop of Buckingham.
The Right Rev. Gilbert White, Bishop of Willochra, Australia.'[95]

Of these, Alston May of the Universities Mission to Central Africa was the most interesting figure. As Bishop of Northern Rhodesia from 1914 until his death in 1940 he wielded a considerable degree of political influence, which he exercised above all in efforts to protect the native population from the worst excesses of exploitation by Northern Rhodesia's white settlers and miners. He had a reputation for remarkable energy and austerity: until 1927 he toured his vast diocese almost entirely on foot, later switching to bicycle or motor-van and sleeping on a camp-bed.[96] He wrote regularly to Phelps, mingling questions of religious and African politics with news of other Orielenses in the colony:

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[93] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.226-7, Harper to Phelps, 14 March 1927.
[94] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.318-9, McNeile to Phelps, 01 January 1903.
[95] *Oriel Record* III, 6, September 1920, 153.
[96] Bengt Sundkler & Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge 2000), 788; John Weller, 'The influence on National Affairs of Bishop Alston May 1914-1940' in T. O. Ranger & John Weller, eds, *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* (Berkeley, CA 1975), 195-212.

> 'The only Oriel man I have seen lately is Tom Sandford, who is now engaged in the hard and thankless task of holding the scales of justice even i.e. between Black & White, in the mining camp of Broken Hill. Every part of the world has its own special problem today: but I do believe that Africa's colour problem is the stiffest of them all. Here we have got on pretty well up to now: but a big mining development is upon us, which means an invasion of South African men and manners. Alas!'[97]

V

Along with the insights the Phelps correspondence gives us into the mentality of different elements of colonial society, what is perhaps most striking is what it reveals about the informal networks bound the Empire's rulers together. With the exception of those who had served in World War I, most colonial officials and businessmen took up their first posts so young that that the only links they had beyond their families were those of school or college. Shared memories, nostalgia and anecdote were the glue that held these networks together, often with a profound impact on the administration of colonies and on patterns of recruitment and settlement. Orielenses wrote to Phelps to find out what their contemporaries were doing, and to report what they knew. During World War I the martial activities of the living mingled with the melancholy lists of the dead, though sometimes in unexpected ways. While on leave from the East African front W. G. Edwards wrote to ask '…what happened to Deneke with whom I digged for of course he was partly German. Also Von Polier, I am afraid he is fighting tho' I trust for his sake against the Russians.'[98] Equally Phelps enquired assiduously after news of other Orielenses abroad, and was rarely disappointed. L. M. Heaney wrote from Dar es-Salaam 'You enquire of Orielenses. There are not many in Tanganyika – two Baldocks, one in the Forests, one on a Coffee estate; H. R. Herring of the red face, who is also in the Forests; and Kenneth Dobson, who came out to the administration last August. W.F. Baldock is stationed in Dar es-Salaam so he is the old Oriel man whom I see most often. He is the local expert at "squash" and cricket."[99] J. Harper responded to a similar query from Kenya that 'The colony is infested with Oriel men. Offhand I can think of Seldon, Gerald Edwards, Vidal, Schwartze, Donald Seth-Smith, Grieve. Two of my contemporaries, John Hughes and Pitt died here and Philip Newbold who was a settler was killed in the war.'[100] E.R.W. Gillmor wrote from Nigeria that 'Two more Oriel men have recently come out to Nigeria in addition to Hogben & Scott. Gott came about 3

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[97] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.343-4, May to Phelps, 14 June 1925.
[98] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.109-110, Edwards to Phelps, 29 January 1915.
[99] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.238-41, Heaney to Phelps, 21 January 1932.
[100] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.226-7, Harper to Phelps, 14 March 1927.

months ago – I suppose it is the same one - & is I think in the Secretariat at Lagos, & quite recently Backhouse was appointed to this Province. Curious that he should have come to my part of the world.'[101] But often such concentrations were far from accidental – one Oriel man would recommend another, or encourage him to apply, and if they could think of no-one suitable they would write to Phelps, who acted as an informal recruiter for the ICS, the Sudan Political Service and the Colonial Civil Service. When R.M Hansard's superior asked him to find a man to fill a junior inspectorship in the Survey department at Cairo, he wrote to Phelps to ask if he could suggest an Orielensis 'He wants a man who is mathematical, not necessarily of the highest order, who is keen on things geographical, and above all, a man who is a gentleman. I am writing to you, for you if anyone can help me.'[102]

The development of an 'Oriel network' was clearest in the case of the Sudan Political Service, where a connection grew up which was perhaps the closest equivalent any other Oxford College has had to Balliol's with ICS. It began with the appointment of W. H. B. Evans in the very first batch of civilian administrators in 1904, and was clearly encouraged by Phelps, who was frequently thanked for having found new men for the service. Robert Collins estimated that at one time no less than 10% of those serving in the Sudan Political Service were Oriel men, and while that figure is slightly exaggerated the college's contribution was still remarkable.[103] A. H. M. Kirk-Greene's examination of the social and educational profile of the Sudan Political Service demonstrated that there was a certain amount of truth in the old aphorism that the Sudan was 'a land of blacks ruled by Blues', although the Service's officers combined considerable intellectual ability with their sporting qualities. His study revealed the remarkable dominance of a few public schools (Winchester provided 30 officers, and Eton 21, out of a total of 331) of Oxford (180) and within Oxford of a few colleges. Oriel provided no fewer than sixteen members of the Service between 1899 and 1952, second only to New College and equal with Magdalen, both of them much larger.[104] The letters they wrote to Phelps reveal them to be a tightly-knit group, proud of both their sporting and their intellectual qualifications, often larding their correspondence with classical allusions. In between

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[101] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.189-91, Gillmor to Phelps, 18 February 1925.
[102] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.224-5, Hansard to Phelps, 29 November 1911.
[103] Robert O. Collins, 'The Sudan Political Service: A Portrait of the Imperialists', *African Affairs* lxxi (1972), 296 n.8.
[104] A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, 'The Sudan Political Service: a Profile in the Sociology of Imperialism', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, xv (1982), 21-2, 38-9.

making uncomplimentary remarks about the native population of Halfa in the Sudan and mentioning an encounter with Cecil Rhodes's brother, Reginald Winter remarked that 'Naturally, being on the border, they are a motley crowd – varying from colonists from the Southern Sudan to the unstable Hellene, whose character and habits are deplorable. When first I read the notices to passengers on the public ferries at Khartoum, "απαγορευειδι αυπγεως το πτυειν επι του στρωματος"[105] it struck me that such a caution was rather a come-down for the descendants of the occupants of the Salaminian galleys – (and moreover I hope my Greek is not entirely ungrammatical – one forgets the little classical lore that one ever imbibed in the hopeless groping among the maze of Arabic idiom.)'[106] They kept in touch with each other and met as often as their remote postings would allow, celebrating the college's (and Oxford's) successes and doing all they could maintain SPS recruitment from Oriel. J.K. Richardson wrote to Phelps in 1922 from Gordon College in Khartoum, saying

> 'As the latest batch of Oxonians arrived in this country yesterday & all seem very charming, I feel I must write & rebuke you for sending no Oriel men this year, in which rebuke Williams wishes to share.
>
> Next August, however, the Gordon College will want another man in my place, as I am to go out to the provinces. I wonder if you know a likely man. We want one of the same calibre as those chosen for the political service; the pay & social position is the same & after a few years we go out to the political service for a period of 4 or 5 years. […] "A gentleman" is essential, about a 2nd Class in schools & if possible one who plays a little soccer. I feel that Oriel can supply the man we want & make up the deficiencies this year.'[107]

In 1927 G. R. Bredin wrote with satisfaction that 'I hear the Cambridge candidates for the Sudan Political were a very poor collection this year. The Oxford ones were, I believe very good; I hope that Oriel, to quote your own words in your speech at the Gaudy in 1925 "still holds a monopoly in the administration of the Sudan."'[108] That this was still not so far from the truth three years later is reflected in a letter written from El Fasher, Darfur Province, Sudan:

> 'On my arrival here the first thing to greet me was a message from yourself delivered to me by Mackrell who is working with me in the district. He is getting into the work quickly and will do well. Ewen Campbell is in the next district to the North of me and I am hoping to see him in a day or two. It will be the first time I have met him since we did our final Arabic exam together in 1923. I saw Newbold last May. He has just been made Deputy Governor of Kassala Province

[105] 'It is strictly forbidden to spit on the mattresses' (my thanks to Peter Thonemann for this translation).
[106] OA PRO 2/44/1 Africa II pp.587-8 Winter to Phelps 17/03/1909
[107] OA PRO 2/44/1 Africa II pp.411-12 Richardson to Phelps 30/11/1922
[108] OA PRO 2/44/1 Africa I pp.48-9 Bredin to Phelps 07/07/1927

> and is in charge of the Red Sea Coast and hinterland from the Egyptian border down to Port Sudan.
>
> Winter and Penney I left behind me in the Secretariat when I left Khartoum. Arnold Forster you have probably seen within the last month as he has been home trying for a job at Magdalen. Williams is still in the Gordon College at Khartoum. He is now a travelling inspector of the Education Dept. and goes around reporting on the schools. Morrison and Wordsworth are in Dongola Province and I have not seen either of them for some time.
>
> This province (Darfur) was administered from 1924 to 1926 by Bence-Pembroke, of whom I remember you used to say that "his smile was a college asset!"
>
> A census recently held of the members of the Political Service by Colleges brought Oriel out well at the head of the list and I hear the good work is still being carried on, as the latest batch of recruits is said to include three from Oriel.'[109]

In 1932 the *Oriel Record* celebrated the Sudanese connection with an article which traced its history from the recruitment of W. H. B. Evans in 1904 to the appointment of Douglas Newbold as Governor of Kordofan,[110] and in 1936, after Phelps's death, the Sudanese Orielenses affirmed their ties to each other and to the college with a dinner, the culinary reality of which would have had a very hard time living up to the magnificent drollery of a menu that only made sense to the initiated:

> 'Memories of Oriel remain green despite the burning sun of the Sudan. On March 14th ten Orielenses (four were unable to be present) sat down at Khartoum before the following menu: Pamplemousses Manciple; Consomme High Table; Filet de Barbue Phelper, Sauce Randan; Dindonneau Regnante Carolo, saucisses Oxonienses, Legumes Rhodes, Pommes Rosses, Sauce Hardy Norseman; Glaces aux Oranges Adam de Brome, Crème Bartlemas, Gaufrettes R.K.; Savori Skimmery; Fruits Roi Eduard; Café Black Prince.'[111]

The nostalgia revealed in this list of familiar names, combined with a certain delight at the contrast between damp Oxford memories and 'savage' colonial surroundings is a recurring hallmark of the Phelps letters. In 1915 A. W. Facer, atypical of most of Phelps's correspondents in that he was a scientist, wrote from Sinoia in Southern Rhodesia (where he had taken up a temporary war service vacancy in the Rhodesian civil service after being rejected by the military because of poor sight): 'I sit in a small round thatched hut, which shudders, creaks and groans in the strain of a tropical hurricane. Thunder claps and lightning flashes shake the earth and rend the sky. A huge tree just outside has just been rent with wind or lightning, and its top – falling with a huge crash – just missed my hut. Insects of all sizes and colours, scared or shaken from

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[109] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.53-6, Bredin to Phelps, 19 January 1930.
[110] D.M.H.E. 'Ex Africa' *Oriel Record* V, 9, June 1932, 202-4.
[111] *Oriel Record* VII, 3, June 1936, 103.

the roof, scurry round my feet – (one has just dropped down the neck of my shirt) – and my dog whines piteously in the corner. Yet these things are all to me as though they were not, for the "Oriel Record" lies open before me, and my thoughts of yearning, of pleasant and sacred reminiscence, and of sad regret are there.'[112]

He went on to list the names of those killed recorded in its pages. For T. Sandford, writing from Northern Rhodesia, it was the reading-parties at High Force which were the most treasured memory:

> 'Oh those magic names! Mickle Fell — High Cup Nick – the cave. To think that I am allowing myself to be boiled alive – for unlike the sandy Sudan, we have a wet heat here – and my very backbone weakened in a land where we see naught but trees of stunted growth, sometimes walking miles in such a case and when we find a hill we look down on miles and miles of the atoms of nature struggling for supremacy, when I might gazing in rapt amazement at the beetling crags and raging torrents of snow clad Teesdale, drinking in health and British doggedness on the steeple of all the dale, Mickle Fell.'[113]

W. H. B. Evans, Phelps's first Sudanese correspondent, perhaps summed up best what the letters meant to their recipients when he wrote 'Many thanks for your letter. It smelt of running streams, of heather and of an exquisite undercut of beef, and made me long to be with you.'[114] Nostalgia also expressed itself in the sharing of old Oxford jokes 'I suppose there is no chance of their pulling down Keble?',[115] A. R. Wise enquired from Kenya in 1924. Sometimes this could be taken to what seem like unhealthy extremes. G.W. James, working for the Colonial Service in Sierra Leone, wrote in 1920 from Batkanu that 'In the large wooden bungalow in which we are at present living 3 of my predecessors have died during the past 6 years […] the Oriel arms decorate my bungalow verandah wherever I may happen to be.'[116] Five years later he wrote 'At Kennam I have a mud house (not bad as mud houses go, but with no furniture except my own touring kit), which I have christened "Oriel Cottage", affixing a shield with the arms at the front door. I feel that I am part and parcel of the College which has done so much for me, and anything that can keep its memory before me I gladly do. People have remarked that I seem to have a perfect mania for Oriel and all things of Oriel: it is true, and I am not ashamed of it. I am devoted to the old foundation.'[117] And three years later in Moyamba

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[112] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.117-24, Facer to Phelps, 29 November 1915.
[113] OCA PRO 2/44/I Africa ii pp.438-443, Sandford to Phelps, 18 February 1910.
[114] OCA MPP/E 8/1, Evans to Phelps, 16 April 1911.
[115] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.592-8, Wise to Phelps, 22 March 1924.
[116] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.263-5, James to Phelps, 3 October 1920.
[117] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i p.266, James to Phelps, 10 July 1925.

> 'My thoughts are never very far from Oriel, and, as I write, I am faced, at my bungalow table, by a picture of the front quadrangle, framed for nothing for me by one of the Fathers at the Roman Catholic Mission in Moyamba. Flanking it are pictures of the High Street, opposite Queen's, and of Oxford from the top of Magdalen Tower. On a screen facing the front door, our visitors are faced by the old original Oriel shield---now alas! A little battered and worn by frequent journeyings—which I had in my first term as a freshman. So even you would not feel "not at home" in at least one spot in Moyamba.'[118]

VI

The picture which emerges from the Phelps letters and other sources on Oriel's overseas and imperial links is of a college conscious of its imperial connections and fiercely proud of them. Phelps himself had clearly approved of Rhodes, and must have relished a letter from the Cape Town barrister Frank Reid, the first Rhodes scholar (and by this date a selector for the South African cricket team):

> 'I am so bucked with my photos of the Rhodes Memorial that I feel I must send you some. One of them (No.1) – the silhouette view of G.F. Watts "Physical Energy" – you may be inclined to have reproduced in the "Oriel Record". […] Oriel is prominent hereabouts – still more so at the moment, for a horse of that name has just won the race of the South African year!'[119]

There were moments of doubt, however, particularly in the letters of Tom Sandford from Northern Rhodesia, where even before the First World War he deplored the exploitation of black miners, the vulgarity, casual violence, and cruelty of colonial life, 'But of all the rottenest places on the earth let me commend you to Broken Hill'; he even allowed himself some veiled criticisms of Rhodes himself, and 'his principle of England the chosen ruler of the earth.'[120]

> 'But what are we doing for the good of the native [?] We are teaching him a hotch-potch of native & English law; we teach him that he is dirt before the white man, in general that the laws and the white man are things to be respected, wholesome so far as it goes. But we make no attempt as far as I can see to teach him to rule himself speaking of the race as a whole. We have taken away everything from the chiefs bar the name, even their influence and we start at the beginning again. […] I need not mince matters; but I may tell you that I was horrified, and am so still, at the general behaviour of the white man, official & civil, when away from the restraints of civilisation.'[121]

Sandford's are amongst the most intelligent, and prescient of all the letters in the Phelps collection, for he was one of the very rare correspondents who reflected

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[118] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa i pp.271-2, James to Phelps, 21 February 1928.
[119] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.388-90, Reid to Phelps, 06 June 1924.
[120] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.434-7, Sandford to Phelps, 11 February 1909.
[121] OCA PRO 2/44/1 Africa ii pp.444-7, Sandford to Phelps, 14 August 1910 .

intelligently both on the brutality and fragility of colonialism, and who even before the First World War questioned how long it could survive. Phelps's death in 1936 marked the end of an era in more ways than one: while Oriel lost the core of its institutional memory, and thousands of former students a much-loved tutor, the Empire lost the node of one of its more important networks. Increasingly attention would turn to events on the continent, and hints of the coming cataclysm could be found surprisingly early in the pages of the *Oriel Record*, in a report from Guy Wint, an exchange student in Berlin: 'Today the National Socialists think they see in Hitler the third great leader [after Frederick and Bismarck]. Thus, on the one hand, there are untrained politicians, and on the other intolerant subjects looking for a demi-god.'[122] The British Empire's contribution to the war effort was gigantic (although until recently often unacknowledged), but the strain also hastened its dissolution.[123] Although anxieties about local nationalism are visible in some of the letters Phelps received in the 1920s and 1930s, probably none of his correspondents could have envisaged so swift a retreat from Britain's imperial possessions and responsibilities as took place in the twenty or so years after the Second World War, effectively ending Oriel's (and Oxford's) role as a nursery for colonial administrators. Whilst Oriel's international links increased greatly in the post-war period, it would be on terms of increasing equality and reciprocity. Ever larger numbers of students came to the college from overseas, but not only from the Anglophone world of the Empire and Commonwealth. Orielenses continued to make careers abroad, but increasingly they did so without any particular political privileges or power. The change was embodied in the figure of Hugh Lambrick ICS (1904-1982), an Orielensis who apart from a brief stint as District Magistrate of Sholapur in the Bombay Presidency from 1937-9[124] served in Sind from 1927 until Indian independence cut short his administrative career, whereupon he returned to Oriel as a research fellow. Lambrick produced a series of scholarly works on the ancient and modern history of the province he had administered for twenty years, winning the Royal Asiatic Society's Burton medal in 1978, but he always seems to have harboured a certain regret and resentment at the enforced end to a career he had clearly loved.[125]

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[122] F. Guy Wint, 'Oriel and Berlin' *Oriel Record* V, 9, June 1932, 213.
[123] See Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London 2006).
[124] Manjiri Kamat, 'Disciplining Sholapur. The industrial city and its workers in the period of the Congress ministry, 1937–1939', *Modern Asian Studies* xliv (2010), 100.
[125] H. T. Lambrick, 'Prospects for a United India after the cessation of British Rule as these appeared in Sind 1930-46' in C. H. Philips & M. D. Wainwright, *The Partition of India. Policies and Perspectives* (London 1970), 516; his best-known works were *Sir Charles Napier and Sind* (Oxford 1952); *The Terrorist – translated and edited from the Sindhi* (London 1972) and *Sind before the Muslim Conquest* (Hyderabad 1973).

With hindsight we can now see what an extraordinary period Phelps's life and correspondence covered – the high point of Britain's reach and influence in the world, reflected in a vast collection of letters collected by a single, rather eccentric clergyman at Oriel. Their significance goes well beyond the history of Oriel, for they demonstrate clearly the importance of educational and institutional culture in constituting the imaginative fabric of the British Empire. Phelps's unusually assiduous correspondence has preserved in paper a small corner of an Imperial network that was typical not only of Oxford and Cambridge colleges and public schools, but of many less prominent educational institutions at the time. On leaving the College these very young men carried the ideas they had imbibed there overseas, where they might then spend the next forty or fifty years with only short stints of leave. As Lambrick wrote when reminiscing about his own career:

> 'Who were those district officers? So far as the European element goes, they were men who came out to India at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three direct from British universities. Their ideas about politics and administration were liable to be derived from Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle, the works of Hobbes and Rousseau, and Burke's speeches. For the most part they arrived in India completely innocent of politics and administration from the practical point of view.'[126]

Under these circumstances the friendships, connections and intellectual relationships forged at school or college were often the only link these men had with their contemporaries at home. The shared memories, attitudes and beliefs could span continents, and last for an entire lifetime.

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[126] Lambrick, 'Prospects for a United India after the cessation of British Rule', 505.