EXPORTING SELF-RULE:
THE ROUND TABLE AND THE 1919 INDIA ACT

The events that led to Indian Independence are familiar. Less familiar is the commitment of those in Great Britain who, sharing the yearning of the Indian people for self-government, assisted them in that process—keeping that hope alive in the hearts of Indian leaders—and endeavored to maintain some forms of permanent linkage between Great Britain and India once independent. British historiography has emphasized the British efforts to hold on to the most precious jewel in the Crown, rather than drawing the attention to the enlightened forces working in British society first to prevent the question of Indian independence from assuming dangerously nationalistic connotations, and then to promote a peaceful, forward-looking solution, compatible with the international situation, which would not destroy every possible link with the United Kingdom. The tragedy was that the British were not able to push the path to the final goal, and the partition which followed their failed attempt to fully apply the federal scheme to all-India resulted in a civil war. It is in India, however, more than anywhere else within the Empire, that the Round Table left its more lasting and deep mark in the process of a people towards self-determination.[1]

1. *The Round Table and the Indian self-government process.*

The Round Table started to tackle the Indian question on the initiative of Lionel Curtis, who on 24 October 1916 landed at Bombay. He arrived with the reputation of being responsible in the Transvaal for imposing on Indians the payment to the authorities of a large residence fee, and the compulsory registration, for men and women, of prints of all their ten fingers. Copley argued that the discriminating provisions imposed by Curtis on Indians in South Africa proved "to be the beginning of Gandhian passive resistance."[2]

According to Sir James Meston—Governor of the United Provinces, and later to become Indian representative at the War Imperial Cabinet and Conference, who had been associated with the Milner's 'Kindergarten' in South Africa—Hardinge's decision to bring Indian troops into the fighting line in Europe had "precipitated a claim to something akin to colonial self-government which we have long anticipated, but which we had hoped to keep quiet for another generation." The war effort had led the self-governing Dominions to share with Britain the war debts, bringing "the need for a constitutional reconstruction beyond the region of argument." Indian demands for self-government, raising the question of Indian representation within an Imperial Parliament, would initiate, according to Meston, "one of the most critical periods in our Indian administration." If the Dominions were "to control foreign affairs without declaring their independence," "no other system" was possible, but the "difficulty" seemed to

[1] For an analysis of the role played by the Round Table in India, see: S. R. Mehrotra, "Imperial Federation and India, 1868-1917," *Journal of Comparative Political Studies*, 1, 1, (1961): 29-40; W. C. De Ellinwood Jr., "The Future of India in the British Empire: The Round Table Groups Discussions, 1912," *Nanyang University Journal*, 3, (1969); id., "The Round Table Movement and India," *The Punjab Past and Present*, 8, (Oct. 1974): 477-509; G. Robb, "The Bureaucrat as Reformer: Two Indian Civil Servants and the Constitution of 1919," *Rule, Protest, Identity: Aspects of Modern South Asia*, G. Robb and D. Taylor eds. (London: Curzon Press, 1978); Segal Patterson, "The Decline of Dominance: India and the Careers of Lionel Curtis, Philip Lothian and Reginald Coupland," PhD diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1989; Chandrika Kaul, "The Round Table, the British Press and India," in *The Round Table*, Bosco and May, 359; id., "A New Angle of Vision: The London Press, Governmental Information Management and the Indian Empire, 1900-22," *Contemporary Record*, 8, 2, (Autumn 1994): 222-224; Deborah Lavin, "Lionel Curtis and Indian Dyarchy," in *The Federal Idea*, Bosco, vol. 1, 193-209; Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, "Political Science and Political Theology: Lionel Curtis, Federalism and India," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 24, 2, (1996): 197-217. On partition, see A. I. Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Pres, 1987).

[2] Antony Copley, *Gandhi: Against the Tide* (Oxford: 1987), 23.

Curtis not "as insuperable." The question of Indian representation at an *ad hoc* Imperial Conference, summoned after the war to draft a Constitution for the Empire, would be inescapable.[3]

William Marris—a senior and authoritative member of the Indian Civil Service who had been involved with the Kindergarten in South Africa—had been the first of the Kindergarten to suggest that "self-government…however far distant, was the only intelligible goal of British policy in India," against the predominant attitude of considering Indians desperately backward peoples, incapable of managing any form of responsible government. India however lacked, according to Marris, the civic sense, "integrity, public spirit, honesty, humanity, unselfishness, tolerance, compassion, temperance," qualities which enabled democracy to work successfully. "In deciding to impose Western forms of government on India in 1917-1919," in a country in which religion was still the dominant force, Marris later admitted that the Round Table "did not sufficiently take into account the obstacles in the path."[4]

It was however only during Philip Kerr's first visit to India in 1912 that the Round Table started to think in terms of a gradual process to "create in India a self-governing, responsible Dominion" which, if it decided to remain within the British Empire, would offer a solution to the "greatest difficulty which presents itself to the world today." The historical meaning of the British Empire would then have been, according to Kerr, to "associate Indians with the government which control Indian affairs," and to overcome "the world-old feud between east and west, black and white," and create "a system based on mutual give-and-take." If Curtis at this stage thought that the "premature extension of representative institutions throughout the Empire would be the shortest road to anarchy," Kerr thought that the British were "indispensable" to India, since the country was "still divided within itself," and Indians were not yet capable of "administering the vast governmental machine." India should "for all time remain within the Empire," and progress towards self-government appeared just as an "ideal goal."[5]

Kerr was convinced that the "watchword" of the British Empire was "not dominion but liberty." "In place of the dominance of one race, as the cement of an Empire's unity," the Empire put "the spontaneous loyalty of the inhabitants to its self-governing institutions and the free spirit which forms them." If Kerr thought that for "the first time in history conquered people, incapable of maintaining order among themselves, were governed not mainly in the victors' interest, but in their own," Milner was prepared to grant self-government to the Dependencies "without letting the supreme control out of Imperial hands." Oliver, alarmed about Kerr's views, urged Milner to "draw the attention of the Round Table young men to the elementary fact that democracy has proved its utter incapacity." Believing that the democratic decision-making process gave the "ultimate power on all matters...to an ignorant people," Milner was easily persuaded by Oliver that democracy was "going to fail, and the British Empire with it."[6]

Kerr was in favour of some concessions to Indian claims for self-government, but against allowing Indians a large representation within the Legislative Council, as provided by the Morley-Minto reforms,

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[3] Meston to Curtis, 16 May 1915; Curtis to Meston, 16 July 1915, MeP, Eur. F 136/11.

[4] Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 42; May, *The Round Table*, 199.

[5] Philip Kerr, "The Meaning of the British Empire," 30 July 1912, a speech given at the Canadian Round Table groups, printed in *The Round Table in Canada* (Toronto: 1917); Curtis, *The Commonwealth*, 24; Philip Kerr, "Memorandum on the Representation of India," n.d., LP, 3/222-32. For a discussion of the role played by Kerr and Curtis in Indian and Commonwealth affairs see: Andrea Bosco, *Lord Lothian. Un pioniere del federalismo (1882-1940)* (Milano: Jaca, 1989), 13-61, 175-215; Butler, *Lord Lothian*, 175-89; Gerard Douds, "Lothian and the Indian Federation," in *The Larger Idea*, Turner, 62-76; Deborah Lavin, "Lionel Curtis and Indian Dyarchy," in *The Federal Idea*, Bosco, vol. 1, 193-209. On Anglo-Indian relations, see: R. V. Vernede, "Memorandum on Indo-British Relations 1928-1947," *Indo-British Review*, 19, 2, (1991): 1-13. On Curtis and India, see: Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, "Political Science and Political Theology: Lionel Curtis, Federalism and India," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 24, 2, (1996): 197-217; D. C. Ellinwood, Jr., "The Round Table Movement and India, 1909-1920," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 9, 3, (Nov. 1971): 183-209; May, *The Round Table*, 189-200; Lavin, *From Empire to Commonwealth*, Ch. 7; W. C. De Ellinwood, "The Future of India in the British Empire: The Round Table Gooup Discussions, 1912," *Nanyang University Journal*, 3, (1969): 196-204.

[6] Philip Kerr, "The War in Europe," *The Round Table*, (Sept. 1914): 613; id, "Anglo-German Rivalry," *The Round Table*, (Nov. 1910): 9; John Marlowe, *Milner. Apostle of Empire* (London: 1976), 133; Kerr to Curtis, 23 Dec. 1910, *Annals of the Lothian Foundation*, vol. 1, (1991): 302; Frederick Oliver to Milner, 16 Dec. 1914, MP, 221; Milner to Lady Edward Cecil, 16 May 1903, quoted in Cecil Headlam, *Milner Papers*, vol. 2 (London: 1933), 446-449; Milner to Curtis, 27 Nov. 1915, CP, 2. See also Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men*, 132, 141.

which "would enable them, like the Irish today, in combination with large minorities, to turn out of office the Cabinet which ultimately controls Indian affairs." This view was supported by senior British civil servants, such as W. H. Buchan, Meston, E. D. Maclagan, E. Molony, and H. T. Cullis, who thought that India was not governed by "an autocratic bureaucracy," which could "do as it likes, but by a very limited bureaucracy, very sensitive and very deferential to public opinion." Meston, on the other hand, thought that it was necessary to declare that self-government was "one of the ideals at which our rule in India is to aim."[7]

Curtis was initially against granting Indians even a symbolic representation within an Imperial Parliament on the ground that "until we are really prepared to accord the Dependencies governing power we are only laying up…a store of misunderstandings by pretending to do so." He accepted however that the Round Table's "guiding principle" should be "the conception that Indians should be regarded as fellow citizens of one super-commonwealth with ourselves, and…to prepare them first for the control of their own sub-commonwealth and finally for an equal share in the control of the super-commonwealth." According to Lavin—who produced a most comprehensive and unequalled study of Curtis's contribution to Indian self-government—in propagating "the multinational Commonwealth" Curtis was "the first to explore in any detail the ideal of multiracial Commonwealth."[8]

Curtis attributed his change of view on India to Meston and Marris, who exercised the initial pressure for a more sympathetic Round Table consideration of India. "So far," Curtis confessed, "I had thought of self-government as a western institution, which was and would always remain peculiar to the peoples of Europe." From the moment Curtis began to think of self-government as a universal principle, "rather of all human life…the goal to which all human societies must tend," he then found that the "British Commonwealth" was "the greatest instrument ever devised for enabling that principle to be realized, not merely for the children of Europe but for all races and kindreds and peoples and tongues." This was a view reinforced by Coupland, who thought that "the moment when the Indian problem will become acute" was "rapidly approaching," and it was "supremely important that both here and in the Dominions people should be informed as to the true outlines of the situation."[9]

The difficulty was that India was not self-governing. The Councils created with the Minto-Morley reforms of 1909 gave the new Indian National Congress the negative role of obstructing the government: "What they want," Meston observed, "is something that will make India a bigger and more dignified figure in the world. Not knowing exactly how to put it into words they use the formula colonial self-government." The British would have had "many big problems on its hands without India," Meston warned the Kindergarten: "it will be the old story of giving the rascals anything they want so long as they remain quiet; and there is a deadly risk of the British work in India receiving a serious set-back."[10]

2. *Curtis and the dyarchy scheme*

The idea of associating the Indians with the British civil servants in the management of Indian local affairs—later defined as dyarchy—was conceived by Curtis when "all the schemes of which I could hear"—he recollected writing to the new Viceroy Chelmsford—"seemed to me to involve progress towards paralysis of government rather than responsible government." "They all proceeded by leaving the executives responsible to the Indian Parliament," Curtis observed, "while rendering them dependent first for legislation and presently for supply on Indian electorates." Curtis, aware of the fact that many areas of Indian Government would be kept out of the control of Indian electorate—an issue faced by Lord Durham

[7] Philip Kerr, "Memorandum on the Representation of India," RTP, c 826, 4-14; c 826, 45-56, 75-8, 79-85, 208-10, 143-58; Cullis, "General Note," RTP, c 826, 79; James Meston, "Memorandum on India and the Empire," Dec. 1912, RTP, c 826, 86-104.

[8] Curtis, "Note of Philip Kerr's Indian Memorandum," 1912, RTP, 826, 233-40; Lavin, "Lionel Curtis and the Idea", 97.

[9] Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 42; Coupland to Curtis, 20 Feb. 1917, RTP, c 810, 7-8.

[10] W. Marris, *The Coming Crisis in India*, 5 Oct. 1915, RTP, c827; Meston to Curtis, 16 May 1915, MeP, Eur. F 136/11.

in the Canadas—then proposed to the Kindergarten "the possibility of proceeding on another principle, that of calling into existence provincial authorities responsible to Indian electorates, and delegating thereto specific functions and revenues, adding others from time to time as experience warranted." The Kindergarten's first reaction was to reject Curtis's proposal to associate the Indians with the British in the exercise of local self-government.[11]

Curtis however managed to persuade the most sceptical members of the inner circle that the question of Indian self-government would have to be tackled without further delay, recollecting the South African experience, when the Kindergarten agreed that the colour question should be managed by the South African Legislature. "Had we dealt with the native franchise throughout South Africa," Curtis observed, "the whole operation would have broken down. We succeeded in settling the relations between the white communities, leaving the relations of black and white for more gradual settlement." First the white self-governing Dominions should settle their own relations with the creation of an Imperial Assembly as Lower House, then representation should be offered to the Dependencies in an Upper Chamber modelled on the American Senate. The Dominions, the United Kingdom and India should each have an equal representation of fifteen members, Curtis suggested, while Egypt should have five, and the other Dependencies one or two. Indians would then rise to the status "not as helots but as fellow-citizens."[12]

From his Dominion tours Curtis returned convinced that the administration of the Dependencies was not "one of the problems of history but *the* problem," which the Dominions had directly to face in order to play a responsible role in imperial foreign and security policies. Curtis saw, in the Dominions' constraints on Indian immigration, negative attitudes which would cause tensions in the managing of Indian affairs. Curtis became convinced that the Empire would "violate its own essential principles," unless it applied the principle of citizenship to all the communities which it governed. "Wherever the Imperial problem," Curtis concluded, was met, "it may invariably be traced to some failure to separate local from Imperial issues."[13]

The question of self-government and Indian representation in the Imperial Parliament was discussed at length among the members of the Round Table and, in spite of some resistance from Malcolm, Chirol, Craik and Martin Holland—afraid of Dominion opposition to India's membership within an Imperial Parliament—the political stance upheld by Kerr and Curtis was, eventually, finally approved. The Indians should be considered British citizens, with full rights.[14]

That choice represented, according to S. R. Mehrotra, "almost a revolution in imperialist thinking," since "it rejected the current imperialist dogma that non-white communities were incapable of self-government, and that they should remain satisfied with good British Government." Lord Hailey argued that the Round Table's approach to Indian reforms was opposite both to Indian Nationalists and to the Government of India, addressing directly the question of India's inclusion within Imperial decision-making institutions. Hailey thought that Curtis forced the British establishment to look further than the immediate question of some concessions to Indian Nationalists, and addressed the fundamental question of the essential goal of British rule in India. Once the goal of self-government had been set, the Round Table thought that everything would follow accordingly, and the British Government should decide the forms and the time-table for achieving this end, which foresaw the permanent and voluntary association of India to the Empire/Commonwealth.[15]

On the issue of representation the Round Table was however divided. Curtis was against immediate Indian representation within an Imperial Conference, while Kerr suggested just one representative of the Hindu and one of the Mohammedan communities. Meston and Marris opted for two or three. Preoccupied with Anglo-Dominions relations during the war effort, the Round Table produced many documents on the Indian question, which had been left aside until India's relevant and generous financial and military aid to

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[11] Curtis to Chelmsford, 8 Sept. 1917, RTP, c810.

[12] Curtis to Meston, 25 Sept. 1915, MeP, F 136/11.

[13] Curtis, *The Commonwealth of*, 345.

[14] Philip Kerr, "Memorandum on the representation of India," June 1912, LP, 3; id., "India and the Empire," *The Round Table*, 8, (Sept. 1912): 587-626.

[15] S. R. Mehrotra, *India and the Commonwealth, 1885-1929* (London: 1965), 83, 56-106; Kendle, *The Round Table*, 224-9; Lord Hailey, "Lionel Curtis," RTP, C864, 199-209.

Great Britain comforted all those who feared that once independence was achieved India would be lost. Kerr's idea of the Empire as a bridge between East and West, which by that stage was shared by the more pragmatic members of the movement, implied that self-government and Dominion status should be granted as rapidly as possible. Since Curtis had a greater capacity for synthetic thought and imagination than Kerr, the Round Table asked him to set out the constitutional principle for gradually introducing self-government in a country of three hundred and fifty million inhabitants. This made India the same size as Europe, with profound ethnic and religious differences within itself, culturally a long way off from Western civilization, and only recently unified politically under British rule.[16]

The problem was to grant the Indians self-government gradually, managing the period of transition cautiously, but unequivocally. On the basis of the federalist doctrine of the division, balance and respective autonomy of both local and central powers, Curtis proposed a system of Anglo-Indian dyarchy at the local level, leaving control of central government to the British, with a view to creating an autonomous federation. If the Indians could show that they were capable of running local government efficiently in collaboration with the British, then the British themselves would gradually relinquish first local, then central power, once a federal constitution had come into force. The co-existence and co-ordination of two authorities on the same territory would improve Anglo-Indian relations, since it would force the two communities to work together, would speed up the process of education for democracy, and would also allow the Indians to learn the working of the federal system, even if only in embryo. Provincial legislatures and executives should, according to Curtis's scheme, be made responsible, before an Indian electorate, "for certain functions of government to begin with, leaving all others in the hands of executives responsible as at present to the Government of India and the Secretary of State." "Fresh powers" should be progressively transferred "from the old governments as the new elective authorities developed and proved their capacity for assuming them." Indians would thus be trained in the "exercise of genuine responsibility."[17]

Curtis's idea was met with an initial scepticism by most members of the Round Table, but as soon as other schemes demonstrated unworkable it was eventually taken up and developed into a project by Sir William Duke—former member of the Bengal Executive Council, officer in the India Office, and member of the Advisory Council of India—who had been imbued with Round Table ideas during a week-end at Blackmoor, country residence of Selborne, to discuss the first draft of *The Problem of the Commonwealth*. Curtis's scheme developed into a memorandum, discussed at length in early 1916 by the Round Table at Trinity College Oxford, and sent on his own request to the new Viceroy Lord Chelmsford—who as Governor of New South Wales had helped Curtis considerably in creating Round Table groups in Sydney and Brisbane—as he was looking for ideas on which to base a declaration in favour of Indian self-government, in appreciation of India's generous military war contribution. The Round Table's proposals were incorporated in the *Duke Memorandum*, and were circulated in early 1917 among the Governors of the Indian Provinces. They proposed a complete departure from the Moreley-Minto scheme, which contemplated technical electoral changes in the formation of the Indian Legislative Councils and in the selection of the Indian members of the executives, broadening the gulf between an Indian legislature with limited powers and a British-dominated executive. The Memorandum proposed a tentative application of the principle of dyarchy to the Province of Bengal, with an immediate transfer of competences for education, local self-government and sanitation, and direct control of revenues for these purposes. The British Government would decide when the time was suitable to transfer more competencies to the local governments.[18]

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[16] Philip Kerr, "An Outline of the Indian Chapters," 2 July 1915, LP, 16; id., "Memorandum on the representation of India," June 1912, LP, 3; id., "India and the Empire," *The Round Table*, (Sept. 1912): 587-626. William Marris, "Memo on India and the Empire," June 1912; Sir Valentine Chirol, "Memo on India," July 1912; G. R. Craik, "Note on the Principle of Indian Representation," July 1912; D. O. Malcolm, "Memorandum," July 1912, (quoted in Kendle, *The Round Table*, 227). On the involvement of Meston and Marris in Indian affairs, see G. Robb, "The Bureaucrat as Reformer: Two Indian Civil Servants and the Constitution of 1919," *Rule, Protest, Identity: Aspects of Modern South Asia*, G. Robb and D. Taylor eds. (London: 1978).

[17] Kendle, *The Round Table*, 231; Curtis, *Dyarchy*, xxiii; id., *The Commonwealth*, 345.

[18] Kendle, *The Round Table*, 232-3. According to Curtis, he discussed with Chelmsford the idea of dyarchy before his appointment, (Curtis, *Dyarchy*, xxvii.)

In a debate at the Lords in November 1927 Chelmsford declared that when Curtis handed over to him the *Duke Memorandum* he made him think that it was an official document from the India Office. It was Austen Chamberlain who persuaded him that it was necessary to educate Indians in the art of self-government. In fact, Chelmsford—who asked Curtis to send him the *Duke Memorandum*, which therefore was kept strictly confidential and not circulated among the Dominion Round Table groups for discussion as was first decided—committed himself to support the Round Table scheme before he was appointed Viceroy in March 1916, an appointment strongly supported by Milner. The acceptance, in the *Duke Memorandum*, of self-government as the goal of British policy in India was the first British official recognition of the principle, opening the way to the 20 August 1917 Montagu Declaration.[19]

Curtis spent the first three weeks after his landing in Bombay on 24 October visiting friends and acquaintances such as Sir Stanley Reed, editor of *The Times of India*, Chelmsford, Claude Hill—a member of the Viceroy's Council—Marris, Chirol and Meston. Then he started to collect material for a survey of Indian affairs, and to form Round Table groups in Calcutta and Nagpur.

Marris was alarmed by Curtis's presence in India:

> Curtis is here: hard at work, interviewing—not yet preaching but with difficulty will he be restrained. We can't deport him, and we must take the risks...He stands rigidly by unfitness for self-government at present, but he may return from Calcutta another C. F. Andrews denying that any official has the least insight into the Indian mind. He may cause the R.T. and all its works to be violently denounced in India as wolves in sheep's clothing. He may stimulate the self-government demand enormously by his argument that until self-government comes they can't get into the Imperial Parliament. He may be consulted as the big medicine man on the subject of self-government and how to attain it. If he is I doubt if he will plead ignorance and hold his peace long.[20]

Curtis's leadership on the question of Indian self-government offers us the exact measure of his role within the organization, and his historical stature. Writing to Brand in 1912 on Curtis's character, Kerr remarked that liberty meant "the willingness to assume responsibility for the results of one's action." That was the reason why Curtis was, according to Kerr, "the freest human being" he had ever met, and was "always able to escape the charge of recklessness," since he was "always prepared to bear the results of his actions whatever they may be and whatever he has anticipated them, or not."[21]

As soon as Curtis realized that something had to be done in order to push for the immediate implementation of the *Duke Memorandum*, he decided on 13 November 1916 to summarize his views in a letter to Kerr, and through Valentine Chirol, *The Times* foreign editor, printed "several hundred copies" to circulate among Round Table groups in Britain and the Dominions. He thus widened as far as possible the debate on the future relationship between India and the rest of the Empire. Curtis's apparent naivety—but the 'prophet', as he was by then called, was by no means unaware of the consequences of such a risky move—brought him suddenly to the centre of political debate in India, since passages of his open letter to Kerr were printed and circulated among members of the Indian National Congress, and the All-India Muslim League, assembled in December at Lucknow. Curtis presented the letter as representing the "joint view" of Meston, Marris and Chirol, senior officials of the Indian Civil Service, and introduced "the question" as "a simple one": British subjects in the self-governing Dominions had to share "on an equal footing with those of the United Kingdom" the supreme responsibility to "assume control of the future and fate" of 370 million people living in India and Central Africa, yet unable to exercise responsible government. If the Central Africans were "scarcely capable of forming any valid opinion as to how they ought to be governed," with the peoples of India it was "otherwise."[22]

The domestic and foreign affairs of India and Central Africa were already controlled by the British "on different principles". The foreign affairs of the two Dependencies were completely under British rule, but Indian domestic affairs were run on a somewhat shared rule. The duty of the Round Table was to

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[19] Lord Chelmsford to the House of Lords, Nov. 1927. In a previous debate in the Lords on 12 Dec. 1919, Lord Crewe supported the version of the commitment of Chelmsford before his appointment, (Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 70). William Duke, *Suggestion for Constitutional Progress in the Indian Polity*, 1 May 1916, MeP, 136/11; the *Duke Memorandum* is reprinted in Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 1-37; Mehrotra, *India and the Commonwealth*, 101-105.

[20] W. Marris to Malcolm Seton, 21 Nov. 1916, SeP, E267/5/1.

[21] Kerr to Brand, 8 Feb. 1912, BrP, 182.

[22] Curtis to Kerr, 13 Nov. 1916, (quoted in Bosco, *Two Musketeers for the Empire*, 126).

educate British opinion on the fundamental differences between India and Central Africa, and on the necessity of solving the problems arising "from the contact of East and West," and pressing the British Government to allow the Indians somehow to control their foreign affairs. At the same time the Round Table had to persuade the Indian Nationalists "of the mischief to their own cause" in carrying on a campaign against British rule. "The cultivation of hate," Curtis stressed, "here as in Ireland is the greatest of all obstacles to freedom, an *ignis fatuus* which only leads men into an ever-deepening morass."[23]

"This vast varied and closely congested community," Curtis stated in his open letter, contained "small but important sections who can and do formulate opinions on political questions." These sections were "relatively too small," and therefore could not be accepted "as the final criterion of Indian policy." Being little representative of Indian society they could not "discharge" the responsibility of taking decisions on an overwhelming majority which would "overpower them," and the British were not able to enforce decisions which were not their own.[24]

"Indian opinion," Curtis pointed out, "cannot rule India, at any rate until the Indians capable of forming such opinion were united, organized and numerous enough to exact regular, willing and continuous obedience from their fellow-countrymen who have not yet acquired the faculty of political judgment." Indian opinion seemed not "really as sound and disinterested as ours now is."[25]

It had to be improved "in quality as well as in quantity," and the fundamental duty of the British was to "improve both…and to allow it to influence policy more and more." The British should therefore continue to rule India for the time being, reserving for themselves the responsibility for final decisions, but they should look "to a time, however remote, when it will be able to transfer that responsibility to a section of Indians sufficiently large, disinterested and capable of sound political judgment to assume it."[26]

The publication of abstracts of this letter produced an upsurge of protest by the Nationalists. "BEWARE OF THE ROUND TABLE, BEWARE OF CURTIS," ran the headlines over an article which depicted Curtis as a man who ranked Indians with negroes, the originator —together with Meston and Marris—of a plan to subject India to the Dominions even at the cost of slaughter. The accident provoked strong annoyance by Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, who although he considered Curtis "a most unselfish apostle of Empire and a genuine enthusiast devoting himself wholeheartedly to public service," confessed to Chelmsford that "Curtis's ways irritate me." The open letter in fact appeared at the very time when, thanks to the Kindergarten's own efforts, India was to be represented at the Imperial War Conference and Cabinet, an honour granted only to the Dominions.[27]

Marris soon realized "that this affair will be the end of me." "Curtis was like a man walking with a naked light in a powder magazine and lo! he has blown us up." In fact, Chelmsford's reaction could not be more severe: he vetoed any member of the Indian Civil Service from associating with the Round Table, thus preventing Indians from discussing Curtis's scheme with "the only people who really understand the present technique of their government." Curtis thought that the Viceroy was acting with "extraordinary fatuity," and that the British establishment in India produced a general "prostitution of popular government." This statement produced a temporary breach of his relationship with Chelmsford, who instructed Curtis to communicate with him through Sir William Vincent, Home Member of the Government of India. The result was that Vincent became one of the most fervent supporters of the dyarchy scheme.[28]

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[23] *Ibidem*, 127.

[24] *Ibidem*, 126.

[25] *Ibidem*.

[26] *Ibidem*.

[27] Chamberlain to Chelmsford, 26 Jan., 27 Feb., and 16 March 1917, CP E264/3. Chamberlain initially ruled out Indian representation from Imperial institutions. The platform advocated by the Indian National Congress envisaged provincial autonomy, direct election of four-fifths of the provincial and central Councils, election of at least half of the members of the provincial and central executives by their Councils, the reduction of the role of the Secretary of State for India towards the Government of India as the Colonial Secretary to the Dominions, (Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 90-5). Curtis to Meston, 16 July 1915, 25 Sept. 1915, MeP, F 136/11.

[28] W. Marris to W. Seton, 28 Jan. 1917, SeP; Curtis to Coupland, 15 March 1917, quoted in Lavin, *From Empire to*, 143; Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 96-124.

While collecting "opinions, information, and material," Curtis described himself "as a sort of super-journalist…pumping people with first-hand knowledge." *Bombay News* "ransacked" the pages of the *Round Table* "for extracts to support the charge of...'velvet paws hiding sharping claws'." The "mere name of the Round Table has become a powerful weapon for raising distrust," Curtis later recollected.[29]

Elevated to the centre of public debate, Curtis decided to postpone his return to England and stayed in India till March 1918, producing a number of studies on the question of local responsible government which he thought would strengthen the Round Table's case. Curtis then decided to publish the full text of his open letter to Kerr. "Through this agitation," Curtis remarked, the Congress "have inadvertently given me the whole of educated India for an audience" in support of the case for associating India with the Commonwealth and opening the road to responsible government eight months before Montagu's self-government statement. "Now that I have made some Indian friends," Curtis later observed, he began "to realise how deeply, in their position, I should resent being told that I 'must gradually be schooled to the management of my national affairs'."[30]

In the *Letter to the People of India*, Curtis presented "the whole story of the Round Table movement," dealing "in the most conciliatory fashion" with the episode of his open letter. Curtis exploited "the most glorious opportunity of getting the whole case before the Indian public," publishing the *Letter* with Macmillan, and arranging for its circulation through two agencies which controlled the bookstalls in India. The situation required "patience and goodwill," neutralizing the "impression that the Round Table is sulking." Curtis's "colossal self-confidence" was, according to Michael O'Dwyer, Lieut-Governor of Punjab, indefensible, since "up to then only the Sovereign had addressed messages to the people of India." Those who did not know "their Lionel," Marris remarked, "had laughed at it as naïve, egotistical and sententious…But it had a good effect."[31]

The aim of the Round Table was manifestly to lead opinion, "instead of sitting on it." As opposed to treating the Congress "as being rather 'naughty'," the British should consider it "as the mouthpiece of educated information in India." The "discontinuance of free public enquiry" was attributed by Curtis to "the gradual growth of unrest in India, the development of the Indian National Congress, and the demand for a free parliamentary government of their own." The British failed to recognize in the Congress an active force for self-government, douching the Indians "with cold water from the time of Dufferin onwards." Moderate liberal opinion should be considered as a driving force to implement reforms, and a special role should be given to the press, through Stanley Reed, editor of *The Times of India*, and Valentine Chirol, both of them being closely associated with the Round Table.[32]

3. *The Round Table and the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms*

The Indian deadlock was broken by the replacement—supported by Milner—in July 1917 of Austen Chamberlain with Edwin Montagu—an associate of the Round Table—as Secretary of State. On 20 August he made the famous declaration in the House of Commons according to which

> the policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the Empire.

The use of the wording "responsible government" rather than "self-government" was, according to Lavin, "largely accidental." The significance of the Montagu Declaration is marked by the fact that a

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[29] Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 50, 54, 74; See also his *A Letter to the People of India* (Delhi: 1916).

[30] Lionel Curtis, *A Letter to the People of India*, reprinted in Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 38-95.

[31] Curtis to Coupland, 15 Mar. 1917, RTP, c 810, 12-16; Michael O'Dwyer, *India as I knew It* (London: 1925), 374-5; Marris to Seton, 6 May 1917, quoted in Lavin, *From Empire to*, 142. The manager of Macmillan complained of being used by Curtis "as a distributing agency for his political propaganda," (30 Nov. 1917, RTP, c 831, 55-56).

[32] Curtis to Coupland, 15 March 1917, RTP, c 810, 15; Curtis to Coupland, 19 May 1917, RTP, c 810, 60. Reed became the Vice-Chairman of the war-time Central Publicity Bureau, which ended up to be a means for propagating the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.

British Government dispatch of 26 November 1916 stated "no wish to develop the [legislative] councils as quasi-parliaments."[33]

According to Sir Stanley Reed, editor of *The Times of India*, the Montagu Declaration was drawn up by Milner himself, and issued by Curzon to Montagu. Without the Round Table's cultural and political influence within the inner circle of British decision makers in London and India, ensuring that they understood the constitutional implications of the announcement, and implemented the reforms in a way that moved clearly towards that goal, it would not have been possible. The *Round Table* welcomed the August 1917 Montagu declaration as the "only policy compatible with British traditions and with the principles for which the whole British Empire is fighting at the present day." A postponement would have meant that

> the tale of Indian unrest and indifference would have become known in the West, whilst the early and premature enthusiasm in the English Press for India's deathless heroes would have waned, and the English people might then have said that India deserved no special treatment, and that there was no necessity to include her in the programme of reconstruction.

It was "important to recognise and admit" the "failure" of the Morley-Minto reforms and to act accordingly. "On any other terms there will be in the East an India as more tragic as it is more vast than Ireland itself."[34]

The high hopes raised by the August declaration, together with the hostile controversy stirred by the British press, forced Montagu to leave for India in November 1917 in order to establish the time-table for the introduction of self-government. Shortly before his appointment, Montagu had criticised the Government of India at the House of Commons as "too wooden, too iron, too inelastic and too antediluvian." Arriving in India in November 1917, Montagu denounced "the dishonest, hypocritical, fraudulent and cowardly device of the official majority on the Legislative Council," and stated that he did "not care a brass farthing for the European community out here except the I.C.S." Montagu denied that they had "anything to lose, and their history in politics" was "beneath contempt." The "cruel, dull, soulless, lifeless, thwarting, misshapen, dead hand of the Government of India" had to be reformed, since it was "unrepresentative with a series of mock-panoplies and institutions, a series of frauds with which to cover its misdeeds, a series of hypocracies on its lips."[35]

From being strongly attacked by the radical Indian Nationalists, Curtis soon became the spokesman for moderate Indians, who were then able to distance themselves publicly from the radicals, who actually led the majority of the Congress. Instead of treating the Congress "as the mouthpiece of educated information in India and striving to make its leaders realise the responsibility which rests upon them," the Government of India went, in fact, in the opposite direction, insulating itself, and bringing Indian opinion to look at Curtis "rather as a male Mrs Besant." The Indian press saw in Curtis "the true, genuine friend of India." Curtis felt like "a person who has caught the plague and recovered." He was "so immunized" that he had "a perfect immunity from press attacks." A sign of opening came also from Motilal Nehru—who had previously strongly attacked Curtis in Congress and in the Legislative Council—inviting him to discuss the scheme further.[36]

This caused great embarrassment within the Kindergarten, which delegated Kerr to remind Curtis of the collegiate nature of the movement and not to use the Round Table for personal initiatives. Kerr was particularly critical of the formula used by Curtis to earn the sympathy of moderate Congress leaders—"national self-government as an end"—pointing out that "if India will achieve in a reasonable space of time self-government in the western meaning of the term, it will be in the form of a federation of States,

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[33] For the text of Montagu Declaration, see V. A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 780. For the negotiations which led to it, see Mehrotra, *India and the Commonwealth*, 99-104; Woods, *Roots of India's Parliamentary Democracy: The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms* (Delhi: 1996), 58-66. Circular Letter from Chelmsford to local governments and administrations, 20 July 1916, ChP, E264/51; R. Danzig, "The Announcement of August 20th 1917," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 28, 2, (Feb. 1969), 19-37.

[34] "Indian Politics," *The Round Table*, 8, 31, (June 1918), 587-9; Chelmsford to Meston, 13 Sept. 1917, MeP, F 136/1; Quigley, *The Anglo-American*, 206-7.

[35] Kendle, *The Round Table*, 238-9; *Parl. Deb*., 5th Ser., Commons, 195, 12 July 1917, Col. 2205.

[36] *The Beharee*, 10 May 1917, RTP, c851; Curtis to Hichens, n.d., quoted in Lavin, *From Empire to*, 144.

not as a nation." Kerr eventually persuaded Curtis to reconsider his plan to introduce the representative system at the local level, breaking up the existing provinces into areas of government of limited size and therefore more easily governable, in order to favour a future introduction of a federal structure.[37]

Curtis agreed to the suggestion and drew up a plan for subdividing the existing provinces. This had the assent of the moderates who met during the autumn of 1917 at the home of Lord Sinha, Indian representative at the Imperial Conference, and member of the Imperial War Cabinet. A twelve-point "Joint Address" signed by 64 Europeans and 90 Bengali Indians was submitted to Chelmsford and to Montagu on his arrival in November. P. C. Mitter and S. R. Das were involved by Curtis in the drafting of the *Joint Address from Europeans and Indians to the Viceroy and the Rt Hon the Secretary of State*. If the Indian press attacked it as "a dangerous document" of "consummate ability and a plausible manner," characterized by "fine passages of political wisdom, breathing liberalism, calculated to throw people off their guard," Montagu considered it "by far the best thing the man has done, and I think the best scheme I have seen yet."[38]

Montagu was equally as determined as Curtis to progressively transfer governmental responsibilities to the Indians, finding in Curtis a powerful ally, having to fight both against radical Indian Nationalists and die-hard British senior officials, who realized that their privileges would come to an end. During the six months of his stay, he met Curtis nine times, the first on 1st December 1917, after having read all of Curtis's Indian writings. "I…had my first introduction to the great Curtis," Montagu wrote on his diary on that occasion:

> At last here was a person unprejudiced, keenly interested, properly equipped. I spoke to him with complete frankness…He convinced me that any official majority is a thing which cannot be tolerated…He did not convince me that you could practically subdivide the provinces now, but of course our two schemes are so similar that it really does not matter.

Montagu was fascinated by the way Curtis took himself so seriously. "I wish he sometimes made a joke," he commented, viewing "things from some other attitude than that of Curtis, the Empire-builder." Montagu saw Curtis a few days later and found him "a strange mixture of impossible inhumanity and soundness," but nevertheless he was "going to be most helpful…a valuable acquisition," since he held "in the hollow of his hands *The Times* and Lord Milner." Montagu forgot to mention that behind Curtis there was also *The Observer*, which among the British 'quality press' perhaps carried major credit for the formation of political consent. Montagu was however certainly aware that within the Cabinet not only was Milner committed to supporting the Round Table's programme for Imperial and colonial reforms, but also that his colleagues Cecil and Curzon were behind it. In Imperial matters, Lloyd George too had been already dragged within Milner's and the Round Table's intellectual and political influence.[39]

The Round Table played a crucial role in organizing the Montagu 1917-18 visit to India. His delegation included three members of the movement: C. H. Kisch, Sir William Duke, and Malcolm Seton. Montagu shared Curtis's view that the reforms scheme could not be successfully implemented "without giving an opportunity" to Indians to express their criticism, since it was "absolutely impossible to ignore" the negative consequences produced on Indian opinion by "a long series of statesmen from Macaulay to Morley." "It may be necessary," Montagu thought, to develop contacts "with somebody with a view to getting at what he really wants or thinks. The stereotyped reading of documents and the acknowledgement of them is not good enough."[40]

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[37] Kerr to Curtis, 23 April, 9, 21 and 22 July, 2 Oct. and 8 Dec. 1917, LP, 33.

[38] Curtis to Kerr 28 Aug. 1917, LP, 33; The *Joint Address* is reprinted in Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 326-356; *The Leader*, 25, 26, 29 Nov. 1917; E. Montagu, *An Indian Diary* (London: 1930), 11, entry for 10 Nov. 1917.

[39] On the Viceroy's Indian stay see Montagu, *An Indian Diary*, 76. The Indian writings by Curtis were collected in the volume *Dyarchy*, 39-95, 326-476. Montagu seemed amused to report in his diary Curtis's chameleon-like capacity, which apparently reached the point to approach some Hindus expressing them his desire to become an Hindu himself. After they consulted the Pandits at Benares, they reported to Curtis that in order to become an Hindu he had to "feed a thousand Brahmans every day for a year," at the end of which he had to "commit suicide, and then possibly in his next incarnation he may become a sweeper," (Montagu, *An Indian Diary*, 214).

[40] Montagu to Chelmsford, 3 Aug. 1917; Montagu to Chelmsford, 21 Sept. 1917, MoP, 1; Montagu, *An Indian Diary*, 8.

Chelmsford charged Meston in September 1917 with implementing the Montagu Declaration, instructing him that "it may be that we shall have to consider some possible transfer of power and responsibility." Meston felt annoyed by Chelmsford's "fatuous demand for a scheme for the future of India (within a month) without a word of guidance," and decided to act on his own, bringing together his fellow Governors, and asking for assistance from Curtis.[41]

Montagu, who was aware of the fragility of his own political weight in Whitehall, Westminster and Downing Street, needed the support of the Round Table. Montagu started his political career as an Asquith Liberal, but ended at the head of the India Office within a Conservative-dominated Coalition led by Lloyd George, whose support he could not take for granted. Montagu wanted to leave his personal mark on a historic document, which Marris was drafting on his and Chelmsford's behalf. He had therefore to rely upon "the holy man, Curtis" in order to win over the resistance of Curtis's friend and Round Table colleague Marris and bring him into line. Montagu felt strongly irritated by "the melancholy Marris," who was "worshipping his melancholy gods in his melancholy tent, and more or less willing, but never cheerfully, drafting what" he was "told to draft." Marris's attitude was perhaps a tactical device appropriately studied in order to give Curtis a central role in manipulating the conflicting forces, and to get what he wanted.[42]

The *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, drafted by Marris and Duke, was finalized on 21 April 1918, and published in July with the full support of *The Times*, *Observer* and *Round Table*. Montagu was pleased to see that Kerr "who has much influence with the Prime Minister," was "strongly a supporter of our alternatives," and that Curtis in a letter to *The Times* on 22 July pressed for an immediate appointment of the Franchise and Functions Committees proposed by the Report.[43]

On his return to London Montagu set up a Committee to draft the Reform Bill, and another to handle relations with Fleet Street for a favourable response to the reforms. "I believe that I have more knowledge of the London Press than almost any other British Minister, the Prime Minister always excepted," Montagu wrote to the Viceroy, "and I never lose an opportunity of trying to keep them on our side." Indian specialists in Fleet Street were comparatively few, and the Round Table's influence on the editorial policies of *The Times* and *The Observer*, provided Montagu with an invaluable help. With the assistance of the Round Table, Montagu launched an "organised effort to create opinion in favour of the actions or policy of the Government." The India Office had a "duty" to counterbalance "the persistent repetition...of specious half-truths designed to mislead the ignorant in India and to attract sympathy in other countries." In "its intercourse with newspaper correspondents," he emphasised, it was "clearly legitimate for the publicity department to suggest a line of argument which it would be helpful for a newspaper—if so disposed—to adopt."[44]

Back in London, Montagu discovered that "Cabinet, the India Office, and the political nation had been accustomed," as Lavin pointed out, "to the idea of dyarchy." The Round Table had employed all means to impregnate university students, academics, school teachers, World Missionary Conference organisers, and leaders of the Student Christian Movement, with arguments in support of the Indian reforms. "It is very encouraging to think of you," a schoolmaster wrote to Coupland in January 1919, "instilling Round Table doctrine in the boys at Northampton." The reprint in London in May 1918 of Curtis's *Letters to the People of India on Responsible Government*, helped "to mould opinion in the right direction," when the official *Report* appeared in July. The Round Table set up a Committee which commissioned articles on India and placed them in various journals, bringing "the whole Indian problem before the public." Montagu reported to Chelmsford that he "got *The Times* quite easily," in support of the reforms. Chirol had "been bitten by Curtis with the 'two Governments' plan for the Provinces." In gaining the support of the *Observer*, Montagu commented that Garvin was "a person of considerable influence."[45]

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[41] Chelmsford to Meston, 13 Sept. 1917, MeP F 136/1.

[42] Montagu, *An Indian Diary*, 330, 343-4.

[43] Montagu to Kerr, 12 May 1919, LP, 729; Montagu, *An Indian Diary*, 344.

[44] Montagu to Chelmsford, 15 Apr. 1920, ChP, 4; Chelmsford to Montagu, 10 July 1918, ChP, 9.

[45] Lavin, *From Empire to*, 154; Eric F. Bowman to Coupland, and Coupland's reply, 20 Jan. 1919, RTP, c.831, 122-125; Curtis to Chelmsford, 24 May 1918, ChP, 15; Coupland to H. E. Egerton, 19 July 1918, RTP, c 831, 109;

The *Montagu-Chelmsford Report* received a "generally favourable" opinion from the British press. The major Indian and British newspapers, the *Round Table* reported, "warned the Indian politicians of the folly of an uncompromising rejection." If the scheme were rejected, India would "certainly not get more." The "open hostility" to the scheme shown by "a certain section of the British Press…on the ground of undue haste and precipitation," produced the impression that if Indians "did not rally to their support soberly and promptly", the reforms would probably be "wrecked by those who disliked them." The *Round Table* played in fact a prominent role in guaranteeing British acceptance of the plan for reforms contained in the *Report*. Claiming the label of 'independence', the journal exercised the most determining influence on British opinion, building an almost unanimous consent behind the reforms, a fundamental factor in persuading India of the good intentions of the British Government.[46]

The *Montagu-Chelmsford Report* was attacked by Indian Nationalists, and by British reactionaries as "about the weakest form of government that human ingenuity ever devised." The Provincial Governors described it as discriminatory, while the "undraped dyarchists" saw it as a tricky compromise. Curtis replied to criticism by writing to *The Times*, observing that if "to the English mind" the *Report* was "at best one of a multitude of stars," to "the educated Indian" it was "as the sun obscuring the stars, but bathing the whole world in light." The reforms had to be immediately implemented, in order to allow the British Delegation to go to the Peace Conference "with a clear conscience and a clean sheet."[47]

Writing to Chelmsford on 4 February 1919 from Paris—where he was attending with Curtis the Peace Conference negotiations, and when his *Report* was not yet translated into the India Bill—Montagu noted with satisfaction how Curtis, in spite of his new responsibilities, was "conducting an uncompromising campaign in favour of undiluted dyarchy," adding a note of sarcasm: "Oh these men who live above the clouds on the mountain tops, confident in the sordid imperfections of their fellow men and rightly convinced of the integrity of their own soul."[48]

Curtis and other members of the Round Table helped to win popular support for the dyarchy scheme and made it more palatable to more traditional imperial figures such as Milner and Selborne. Their support continued during the course of the long parliamentary discussions of details, and contributed to ensuring that there was no serious setback on fundamental matters. The reforms, rightly considered a milestone in the history of Indian independence, provided for a wide extension of the franchise, central and provincial legislative assemblies directly elected by an Indian electorate, and the principle of dyarchy at the provincial executives, transferring the administration of health, education, agriculture and local government to the Indians. Law, public order, finance, tax, famine relief and the control of the press were left in the hands of provincial Governors.

After extensive and sometimes animated debate, the *Report* was eventually approved by Parliament in December 1919. Lord Ampthill—former private secretary to Joseph Chamberlain, acting Viceroy and Governor of Madras—speaking in the House of Lords on 16 December 1919 portrayed Curtis as "a globe-trotting doctrinaire, with a positive mania for constitution mongering," and regarded "incredible" the fact that just "for the chance visit to India," he "would ever have thought of so peculiar a notion as that of 'dyarchy'." In the Commons the Bill had the support of the Indian Parliamentary Committee—being the largest parliamentary Imperial pressure group, with the support of over 150 MPs—founded in 1883 to secure "just and sympathetic action" on Indian questions.[49]

During the debate at the Commons, Montagu acknowledged the "great debt of gratitude" that India and the Empire owed to Curtis, for "the patriotic and devoted services…given to the consideration of this problem." Sir Henry Craik—father of George, member of the original Kindergarten—paid a special tribute to Curtis, expressing himself "proud to know him." And he portrayed the Round Table as a "very

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Coupland to Ernest Barker, 15 July 1918, RTP, c. 831 (b), 105-6; Chandrika Kaul, "A New Angle of Vision," 225-232; Montagu to Chelmsford, 15 June 1918, MoP, 2.

[46] *The Round Table*, 9, 34, (Mar. 1919): 330.

[47] Marris to Lord Selborne, 14 Sept. 1919, SP, 83; *The Times*, 22 July 1918.

[48] Montagu to Chelmsford, 15 June 1918, 4 Feb. 1919, quoted in Sigismund David Waley, *Edwin Montagu: A Memoir and an Account of his Visits to India* (Kolkata: Asia Publishing House, 1964), 167, 195. For the text of Curtis' letter see Curtis, *Dyarchy*, 477-81; A. Rumbold, *Watershed in India 1914-1922* (London: 1979), 158.

[49] Quoted in Curtis, *Dyarchy*, xxvii.

active, and…important body of young men," who "have been doing good work, and part of that good work has been done in India." H. A. L. Fisher commended the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, on which the Bill was based, as "one of the greatest State Papers which have been produced in Anglo-Indian history."[50]

The Kindergarten had good reasons to feel pleased with its first success, even if the main credit was due to the two guiding spirits of the movement, Kerr and Curtis. It was Kerr who had first awakened interest in the Indian question within the movement, encouraging Curtis to go to India, channelling the enthusiasm and missionary zeal of his friend to achieve concrete and far-reaching results. Feetham chaired the Committee which allocated functions between central and provincial governments and within the new provincial governments, and Meston played a key role in safeguarding the interests of the Government of India in London and, ultimately, in deciding the financial arrangements for the new scheme.

Kerr had used his influence with Lloyd George to translate the *Report* into law, arranging for a well-disposed Joint Parliamentary Committee to be presided over by Selborne, who in turn helped considerably in overcoming the stern parliamentary opposition led by Churchill. Curtis had been the guiding force behind the reform process, not just by formulating the dyarchy scheme and obtaining the support of the moderate Indians, but also by stirring the Indian public out of its torpor and submission and overcoming the resistance of the English, who were unwilling to surrender sovereignty to India. The 1919 Government of India Act, engineered, negotiated and implemented by the Round Table, is considered the most important single Indian constitutional reform from 1861 to 1946. As well as the introduction of dyarchy, it increased the electorate from two to ten percent of adult men, and gave the vote to one half of one percent of adult women.[51]

4. *An assessment of the Round Table's Indian policy*

Historiographical debate is divided on the role played by the Round Table in India. Rumbold, Gallagher, Seal, Tomlinson, Singh, Bridge and Moore attempted to understate the Round Table's impact on Indian constitutional reforms, identifying in them a defensive response to growing Indian nationalism, and an attempt to *appease* Indians by dividing the Nationalist from the moderate forces, and by making minor concessions. On the other hand, Wint, Coupland, Mehrotra and Woods underlined the liberal and educative aspects of the 1919 reforms, marking a crucial turning point in the process of decolonisation of India, and in the creation of a Westminster-style modern parliamentary democracy.[52]

If Danzig acknowledged that the influence of Curtis and the Round Table group in the reforms "runs…from beginning to end," Robb and Rumbold, on the other hand, dismissed their role as marginal,

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[50] Quigley, *The Anglo-American*, 208.

[51] Kendle, *The Round Table*, 244-5. Beloff argues that Curtis won over Milner and Curzon to the idea of dyarchy: Beloff, Imperial *Sunset,* 201. On Churchill's attitude towards India, see: R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps, and India, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Carl Bridge, "Churchill and Indian Political Freedom: The Diehards and the 1935 Act," *Indo-British Review*, 13, 2, (1987): 26-30; Carl Bridge, "The Impact of India on British High Politics in the 1930's: The Limits of Cowlingism," *South Asia*, 5, 2, (1982): 13-23.

[52] Peter Robb, *The Government of India and Reform: Policies Towards Politics and the Constitution, 1916-1921* (Oxford: 1976), 79-85; J. Gallagher, "The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire," in *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and Other Essays*, A. Seal ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 101; B. R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942: The Penultimate Phase* (London: 1976), 10; A. I. Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-1947* (Delhi: 1987), 244; C. Bridge, *Holding India to the Empire: The British Conservative Party and the 1935 Constitution* (London: 1986), 1-9; R. J. Moore, *Endgames of Empire: Studies of Britain's Indian Problem* (Delhi: 1988), 1, 9-10; G. Schuster and G. Wint, *India and Democracy* (London: 1941); R. Coupland, *The Indian Problem, 1833-1935* (London: 1942); Mehrotra, *India and the Commonwealth*; P. Woods, "The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919): A Re-Assessment," *South Asia*, 17, 1, (1994): 25-42.

attacking the 'whig' interpretation of Indian constitutional history offered by Schuster, Wint, Coupland and Mehrotra, historians contemporary to the Round Table, as ideologically misleading.[53]

Hailey suggested that the Round Table's approach to the Indian question was very distinct from either Indian Nationalists or the British Government, trying to involve Indians in the Imperial decision-making process. In identifying the ultimate goal of British rule in India in nothing short of full self-government, the Round Table and Curtis in particular placed the solution of the Indian question in a perspective of a gradual and evolving process through peaceful and constitutional means. This had the result of guaranteeing the support of a large majority of the British foreign policy élite and public, and a remarkable acceleration of the process. The Round Table contributed to popularising the new scheme and making it more acceptable, especially to more conservative imperial figures such as Milner and Selborne.[54]

Curtis's role as facilitator between the Indians and the British concentrated, in fact, in Bengal, which was the area of the country where relations between the races were particularly strained, and which proved to be decisive in the acceptance of the dyarchy scheme. Curtis's diary reveals, in fact, a wide range of Indian contacts, both with moderate Indians within the Congress, and with radical groups. Curtis managed to persuade Indian moderates to abandon the Congress-League radical positions, on the ground that the Morley-Minto scheme would produce catastrophic consequences for the evolution of complete self-government and the final attainment of dominion status.[55]

Kerr thought that Britain was not in India by "divine right" but as an "indispensable adviser" and therefore the Simon Commission, appointed to report on the application of the 1919 reforms, could not "decide on the future of the Indian constitution" alone, even if it was true "in the strictly constitutional sense"; but in the "political sense" it was untrue, and it was vital that Indians should be associated with the constitutional process. The fact that "Indian sentiment must not merely be consulted but *appeased*" did not meet the favour of Marris and other members of the Round Table, who had however to accept the leadership of Kerr and Curtis on Indian matters.[56]

Perhaps the most illuminating witness on the work done by the Round Table in India during the war is that of E. Lascelles, former New Zealand Round Table member, and by 1919 lecturer to the Indian Army, who urged Kerr to bring the British Government to "make concessions" in India "before they were demanded." Expressing a very critical judgement towards the attitude of the Indian Civil Service, Lascelles thought that "forward thinking should be done" and that "India wants Curtis again." "I have often wondered," Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru wrote to Curtis in 1928, "whether it is possible to arouse again your interest in India. To my mind the personal factor is far the most important thing in a big question like this."[57]

According to Kaul, Curtis was "a visionary and looked to the future as much as responding to the needs of the moment." For his "style and personality, as much as in his views," Curtis "was ahead of other members of the Moot." Curtis was "responsible in large measure for the nature of the Round Table features on the sub-continent," succeeding "in making the journal respond to the Indian situation in ways which, however flawed, might not have existed at all."[58]

Malcolm Hailey considered Curtis's approach entirely novel, "since it anticipated," as Lavin stated, "later nationalist demands for Dominion Status at a time when they were thinking solely in terms of self-

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[53] Richard Danzig, "The Many Layered Cake: A Case Study in the Reform of the Indian Empire," *Modern Asian Studies*, 3, 2, (1969): 69; Robb, *The Government of India,* 79-85; A. Rumbold, *Watershed in India, 1914-1922* (London: 1979).

[54] Hailey, "Lionel Curtis," 199-209; R. J. Moore, "Curzon and Indian Reform," *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 4, (1993): 719-40; Beloff, *Imperial Sunset,* 201.

[55] According to Rajat Ray, "in no other city of India was the relationship between the white rulers and their subjects so tinged with racism" than in Calcutta, Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939* (Delhi: 1979), 231. *Curtis Diary*, Oct.1916 to Feb. 1918, (Curtis, *Dyarchy*, xxx, xxxiv-ix, 326-56). On Curtis's contribution to Indian democratic development, see P. Woods, *Roots of India's Parliamentary Democracy: The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms* (Delhi: 1996), 58-66.

[56] Kerr to Marris, 23 Oct. 1929, LP, 237, 327-32; Marris to Kerr, 25 Oct. 1929, *ibidem*, 237, 333-4.

[57] Lascelles to Kerr, 24 Nov. 1920, LP, 214, 113-5; Sapru to Curtis 26 Jan. 1928, RTP, c832.

[58] Chandrika Kaul, "The Round Table, the British Press and India," in *The Round Table*, Bosco and May, 359.

government, and was light years ahead of the officials who saw reform in terms of immediate possibilities rather than ultimate objectives." "With perfect courtesy," Lockhart commented, Curtis "nearly drove a number of civilians of high rank and long experience to apoplexy, merely by asking them the ultimate purpose of British rule. This was a question which they were entirely unable to answer."[59]

Curtis was portrayed by Garvin in *The Observer* as

> not only a missionary of Empire, but an apostle of Empire. He pursues its most spiritual purposes of emancipation and elevation no less than its political projects of federation. To that cause he gives the whole of one man's life. In a way never equalled before, he succeeded in bringing many of the best British and Indian minds together to hammer out a working scheme of reform.[60]

Dyarchy was conceived, according to Lavin, "as an ingenious transitional device in the Imperial tradition by which these moderate Indian critics of the Government could be mobilised in support of the raj while general political education was accelerated." This period of Indian history could be compared to Canadian history between 1837 and 1845, when Durham's reforms were experimented with. By 1923 Indian moderates "were routed in the elections, having failed to capitalise on the changes," since "the effects of the new Indian franchise had moved the political emphasis away from the municipalities towards electoral politics in the rural areas and favoured the men with Province-wide connections, who combined new regional influence with older local contacts." Non-cooperation, dissatisfaction, and financial difficulties brought to a dead end the dyarchy experiment, with the appointment of the Statutory Commission to review the Constitution two years earlier. According to Quigley, the failure of the Round Table "to persuade the Indian nationalists that they were sincere is one of the great disasters of the century," although the fault was "not entirely theirs and must be shared by others, including Gandhi."[61]

In the framework of an Empire reformed on the basis of self-government and equal partnership for all its component parts, the Round Table advanced a scheme through which the subject races or 'backward people' of the Empire should be educated in the art of responsible government and achieve self-government. According to Kendle it was a "revolutionary idea." Milner's young men arrived in South Africa believing that the backward people "were inherently inferior intellectually, incapable of emerging from the most elementary of tribal systems." It was their South African experience—through "intensive discussions with men of Indian experience and the study of federalism"—which changed their minds. "Their continued affirmation of this principle," Kendle concluded, "set them apart from the majority of their contemporaries."[62]

The idea of the progressive extension of British political, legal, and economic traditions to the white Dominions and, ultimately, to all the Dependencies, was certainly in the interests of Britain's declining power, but it also had a universal meaning, since it represented a path to be followed beyond the confines of the British Empire. Once the road was open for the Indian self-government process, other Dependencies—Ireland, Palestine and Egypt –would follow suit.[63]

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[59] "Sir M. Hailey on Lionel Curtis, written for J. G. Lockhart", RTP, c853/231-241; Lockhart, *At the Feet*, 180.

[60] Quoted in Lavin, "Lionel Curtis and Indian," in *The Federal Idea*, Bosco, vol. 1, 206.

[61] *Ibidem*, 206-7; Quigley, *The Anglo-American*, 206. On Curtis's contribution to Indian reforms see Rumbold, *Watershed in India*; C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics* (Oxford: 1975); B. R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj* (London: 1976); and D. C. Ellinwood, Jr, "The Round Table Movement and India," *The Punjab Past and Present*, 8, (Oct. 1974): 477-509.

[62] Kendle, *The Round Table*, xv.

[63] For an analysis, see: Andrea Bosco, *The Round Table Movement and the Fall of the 'Second' British Empire, 1909-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).