

MELTING POT

Land of Sunshine and Success

“The world lay all before them,” as John Milton said.

And the marvel about Empire was how far it settled – un-settled – re-settled the world.

Towns paid ten pounds a head to get their paupers to find somewhere else than the mother country to settle.

Charities sent 100,000 orphan children to Canada.

Church Homes for Waifs and Strays tried to make the waifs stray to Australia and New Zealand.

Reformatories shipped off their juvenile delinquents

From London’s East End came the children of the poor to Canada, to settle the frontiers, running barefoot in the summer ... and running up the social ladder for the rest of their lives.

The Women’s Emigration Society gathered up young girls, destitute, depraved, desperate, or just ambitious, and found them jobs in the colonies, and paid their way there.

And most of them weren’t sorry they went –

because women got the vote sooner in Australia, New Zealand and Canada

and had more rights to divorce or own property in their marriage.

By 1912, a quarter of a million Britons left the blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, for good.

And a lot were on their way to Australia, Land of Sunshine and Success, as it billed itself.

Once, it took five months to sail there.
Now, a steamship could do it in thirty-eight days.

For sixteen pounds, a British vessel could take you.

For six pounds, a German ship out of Bremen could carry you
– that's less than a bricklayer earned in two weeks!

And there was a continent, welcoming their arrival.

Melbourne, the 8th largest city in the whole empire.

Sydney, with the biggest pipe organ in the world, in the town hall.

Come to Queensland, a half-billion acres and 600,000 people only.

For just one peppercorn paid down in rent, you could get
yourself 5,120 acres of Crown Land.

All you had to do was clear the prickly pear off it.

Or you could settle the whole Canadian west – still open, and all opened
to settlers by the Crown.

In New Zealand, natives bought land from the Maoris for razors, mirrors,
and Jews' harps.

Or do you prefer to lease land? Just two-pence, and an acre of grazing land
in Victoria is yours.
For a shilling, you get clear title to it.

And with 20,000 acres, you can feed six thousand sheep and clear
600 pounds' sterling every year.

Homesteading as a sheepherder in Australia certainly cost a big outlay.

3000 pounds, maybe

Wool-press for thirty pounds
Hut and sheep yard for 75 pounds.

But 2,250 pounds of that sum, the government would help
pay for – boring a well.

These are the real lands of opportunity!

New Zealand's standard of living was the highest in the world –
higher than that of the United States.

Miners in Australia made three times what any toiler in the pits in
Wales could hope to make.

In Nyasaland [Malawi, after 1980], you could hire natives at four
shillings a month to grow your cotton, tobacco, or coffee.

So in Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia, white settlers came

to get rich and set up as planters.

Not all the moving around came so voluntarily.

A hunger for cheap labor made the Empire-builders draw on the great mass of sweltering tropical humanity for more.

Two million Tamils were brought out of southern India to Malaya and Ceylon to harvest tea and rubber.

The West Indies filled up with hundreds of thousands of East Indians brought as indentured servants to work in the sugar cane.

Most people in Fiji WERE from India, brought as laborers.

Indians built the railroads in Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa, worked the gold mines, and set up shops and businesses.

In Hong Kong, many of the police were Sikhs from northern India

In British Columbia and in the Australian gold-fields, a lot of the cheapest labor came from Chinese contract laborers.

There was a full-scale and just barely legal trade in human flesh all through the Antipodes, where the 'blackbirders,' as the labour-ships were called, signed up South Seas islands to work in Queensland, or in the Peruvian guano trade.

It was slavery in all but name, in fact.

There was room enough for all.

In fact, around the turn of the century Joe Chamberlain even proposed creating a Jewish homeland in eastern Uganda

– five thousand square miles of decent-ish land.

– (the sixth Zionist congress even talked it over.

After all, the gift would be as big as Britain itself.)

England itself was part of the melting pot.

For Indian princes, the Empire opened up worlds beyond the subcontinent, and honors as well.

In the 19th century, travelling over “black water” – kali pani – was full of difficulties, religious ones included¹.

(You could lose caste if you left India, in some versions of the Hindu faith.

Of course, this didn't apply to Moslems).

When the Maharaja Takhatsinhji went to see the England of Queen Victoria, he packed carefully...

– he chartered a steamship all his own

– he carried along his own water to drink

¹ Charles Allen and Sharada Dwivedi, *Lives of the Indian Princes* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1984), 163.

(One thing you learn: don't drink the water in foreign countries. Who knows where it's been?)

– he took along his own buffaloes

and his own barbers

and his staff and servants

and his own musician, who really was one of the top of the chart performers in India, a regular Heifitz.

(This was a mistake. The musician, playing in front of the Queen, came back swollen in pride.

People would ask him to perform, and he would say, "But don't you understand? I have played in front of Queen Victoria. Who are you to ask me to play?")

– he took his own cook, to make Indian food

The staff wasn't used to English food and couldn't eat it.

Needless to say, he felt uncomfortable with the manners.

He had learned how to use a knife and fork, specially for foreign travel.

But when they went to a banquet at Buckingham Palace, and finger-bowls were put down before the guests, the Maharajah was baffled, and drank it.

(The Queen, ever a perfect host, to make him not feel

uncomfortable, drank hers, too).²

By 1900, though, a Maharajah's not an unusual sight.

England has them all over the social scene.

Some bought country houses in England and France.

They litter the beaches of Dieppe and seaside resorts.

Indeed, your young prince is expected to do the Grand Tour of the Continent. It's part of the education.

London ..
Cologne....

Nice ...

² Charles Allen and Sharada Dwivedi, *Lives of the Indian Princes* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1984), 163.

Monte Carlo.³

Some princes became all but English themselves. Look to the Maharajah of Baroda, Sayjirao.

His palace had the look of an English country home.

The cook was French.

The major-domo was English.

The chauffeurs were Italian.

The master of the stables was an Irish sergeant-major.

The valet was English.

So were the Maharani's personal maids.

Englishmen ran the army
the police

the colleges

the hospitals

– and not because the Raj insisted; it was the Maharajah that
wanted the best – and English was the best.

When he dined, his table-linen came from Belfast.

It was specially made for him.

When he wanted a new dinner service, he melted the ones he had
down into solid silver and sent it to London.

³ Charles Allen and Sharada Dwivedi, *Lives of the Indian Princes* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1984), 163.

The craftsmen on Bond Street made him something fit for
the time.

If you came, he'd offer you a drink – whiskey or hock for breakfast
champagne or port for evening.

Your nightly dinner would be accompanied with music.

An orchestra, with a French bandmaster.

It might play Baroda's national anthem – which sounded
very French, because the bandmaster composed it.

But for festivals, you have the REAL music of India –

“Bonny Dundee”

“Blue Bonnets over the Border”

.... from the Baroda Highlanders! All in their kilts.

What Christmas went by without plum pudding?

The Maharajah loved the right kind of sports.

His cricket ground was watered and rolled daily.

He had asphalt tennis courts, too.

And gardens – English gardens.⁴

⁴ John Lord, *The Maharajahs*, 142-43.

The Maharajah was a very cultivated, well-read man.

He could tell you about Shakespeare or Lewis Carroll – which he loved.

His rule was enlightened by any standards.

He and his wife set up free public schools for all, women included.

He built libraries

a science institute

an art school.

But with all that, he was not welcome in the British club in town.

Because he was an Indian.

Sayajirao was smooth and scornful – he bought them a new pavilion.⁵

Long standing myth: that the British colonial government deliberately kept non-Malays out of raising rice.

They could get more revenue, by ethnic division of labor...

- the Chinese worked the mines
- the Indians worked on the plantations
- the Malays would produce food for mine and estate workers.

⁵ John Lord, *The Maharajahs*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 144.

So immigrant labor never was able to build an economic base.

That way, Britain could keep wages low.

And Malays were kept from growing export produce like rubber...
Keep 'em growing rice, instead.

That way, food will be cheap.⁶

This is an interesting allegation.

Here is the fact.

1. there was no law, no regulation, to keep rice producing a strictly Malay form of work
2. there was no encouragement for that to happen

And in the few fitful moments when somebody did talk about growing more rice, the Government actually hoped that the Chinese or the Indians would come to Malaya and grow it.

The problem wasn't the government's ban; it was that the Indians and Chinese wouldn't do it.

No profit in it, compared to other things.

You have to clear the land.

⁶ Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai, *The Rice Industry in Malaya, 1920-40* (Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1963), 17-19; Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya, 1874-1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford, 1977), 186-88; Gayl Ness, *Bureaucracy and Rural Development in Malaysia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 31 says the same, but he uses Soo Hai as his only source on this.

Then you have to plant it.

And till then, your income is zero.

A wage job in a factory, you get paid end of the week.,

Rice planting is back-breaking work.

It's just rife with malaria and yellow fever.

For each crop, you have to set out an entirely new set of plants.

If there's not enough water, or insects or rats get in, you lose a big part of the investment.

Rice crops fail, all the time.

Now, rubber... that's different.

When the trees are in place, you just tap them every year.

No need to put in replacements.

And the pay is a lot better, and the profits bigger.

Or you take growing vegetables on a small plot.

That beats rice, too.

You can harvest a crop relatively quickly.

A few harvests a year.

If you lose some plants, that's not a big investment.

So ... would you rather grow something that takes one full year to mature, before you can harvest it?

Or one that takes forty to fifty days to mature?

With a two or four acre plot, a Chinese grown up can get a net return of \$50 a year.⁷

3. In fact, up to 1930, there wasn't even any serious effort to try to have anybody in Malaya grow any rice at all. Between 1918 and 1940, 65% of the rice that Malaya consumed came from abroad.

Domestic production couldn't have made up the difference, if the imports were cut off.

Peasants in Malaya grew all kinds of things...

some rice
fruits
Vegetables

They did fishing, as well.

But all in all, it wasn't enough to feed the colony, and they knew it.

The empire didn't try to make Malaya live on what it ate.

Trying to grow enough rice, the authorities figured, was something the people in Malaya couldn't have done, if they tried.

It'd be terribly expensive to develop a commercial rice economy there.

Anyhow, as long as you could get your grain when you needed it, what need was there?

⁷ See Paul H. Kratoska, "Rice Cultivation and the Ethnic Division of Labor in British Malaya," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24 (April 1982): 280-314.

What changed this was the realization in the 1930s that a foreign enemy COULD shut off grain shipments – COULD starve Malaya out.

And that in a time of Depression, there might not be any rice grown from abroad for Malaya to buy.

Only then did the government decide that it had better act to step up food production – rice, but also other foods, too.

And encouraged peasants to grow specialized crops, not the mix they had grown for themselves.

The policy of Malays-only was, apparently, not the Government's idea.

It was Malays' idea.

They were bothered that just about half the population of Malaya was immigrant: Chinese, Indian.

They'd been shoved out of many other kinds of jobs – they weren't going to be shoved out of rice growing, too.

Malay leaders insisted that they wanted protection for this part of the economy, at the very least.

Like it or not, though, the British didn't really want to melt in a new world.

They might adapt native attire to suit their own needs – but the adaptation was distinctly their own.

They invented the polo shirt
the safari jacket
the divided skirt
chukka boots
and the button-down collar.

But they still insisted on everybody dressing for dinner.

even in the jungle

all the way to corsets.

And even their cure for malaria – the gin and tonic – because it had quinine in it – was a very English pleasure.

They wanted to make it into another England, or carry their England with them.

They played polo in India

And when they couldn't find foxes to hunt, used hyenas instead ...

or strewed scraps of paper, and made a paper-chase.

Their very hill stations in India may have helped them escape the heat of the plains – but they didn't help them escape England.

They came in a style known as “distressed Gothic”

... with lots and lots and lots of tennis courts.

What could be more English than bridge?

But India's civil servants invented it, in Calcutta.

Snooker began in India in 1875, but was refined by an army officer in the south end of the subcontinent.

In Bombay you could hear the clock tower play “Home Sweet Home” on weekdays and hymn tunes on the Sabbath.

English names were scattered all over the world, as if everywhere was a New England.

In southern Ontario, behold towns called

Waterloo

Wellington

Delhi

Newfoundland’s bays and coves are terribly English-sounding...

Bumblebee Bight

Blow me down

Heart’s Delight

Mutton Bay

Go onto the street maps for a town in Ceylon, and there you find

Scrubs Bungalow

St. Agatha’s

Unique View

Agnesia Cottage

Scandal Corner

Westward Ho!

Lahore has a Charing Cross.

Jamaica's counties are Surrey and Devon and Somerset and Middlesex.

India is full of spots named for British engineers and administrators and soldiers – though they have been India-fied...

Clutterbuckganj

Jacobabad

Even where the natives named a spot first, the English gave it a nickname that sounded closer to home –

Johannesburg = Jo'burg

Rawalpindi = Pindi

Alexandria = Alex

Swami Rock in Ceylon = Sammy Rock

C. How the Indians became Niggers

British views of nonwhites wasn't just becoming harsher.

It was getting coarser, too.

To British officers, all dark races were becoming “wogs” or “niggers.”

The Sultan of Turkey was “this little cowardly black man,” to General Garnet Wolseley.

Indians themselves went from brown to black, in English people's eyes, as the century passed.

Only with the Mutiny did soldiers start calling them “niggers.”

Only now did marrying a native of India become absolutely taboo.

Campaigns in India were nicknamed “nigger smashing.”

Story from Egypt.

Collision of King Farouk’s car with a British army vehicle.

Court of Inquiry is called.

The British officer in charge summons the lorry driver to say what happened:

“Sir, I was driving at 16.30 hours on the road in the direction of the Canal Zone when I saw a big sports car approaching with two wogs....”

“OB-jection, your Honor!”

The lorry driver was taken away to teach him the proper language to use before the court.

He comes back, chastened: “Sir, I was driving at 16.30 hours on the road in the direction of the Canal Zone when I saw a big sports car approaching. This car was driven by His Majesty King Farouk of Egypt and another wog....”⁸

The sense of contempt for strange foreign people could be gentle:

Who, or why, or which, or what
Is the Akoondh of Swat?
Is he tall or short,
Or dark or fair?
Does he sit on a stool or a sofa or chair,
Or squat –
The Akoondh of Swat?

⁸ Barrie St. Clair McBride, Farouk of Egypt (London: Robert Hale, 1967), 111.

– Edward Lear

To which another poet replied:

Me, Lear. I'm the Akoondh of Swat.
I'm gracious and fat,
In a very tall hat,
And I'm heating a very large pot.
You know why, and for whom, and for what.

– Ethel Talbot Scheffauer

Foreign names not only mystified the English soldier abroad.

He insisted on Anglicizing it, often into something silly.

The Chinese general San-ko-lin-sin in the 1860 China war was
Sam Collinson.

The Russians had their great Irish general.

Oh, you never heard of Tim O'Shenko?

And how about those two French explorers, Radisson and Groseilliers

... or, as the Hudson Bay company folks called them,

M. Radish

M. Gooseberry?

And in Regent's Park, London, there's a water fountain that was
endowed by a rich 'un from Bombay, Radah Moonee.

Ask any Brit, and he'll tell you it was put up by Mr.
Ready Money.

In figuring out race and how far a half-caste was one race or the other in India, the
custom was to treat it like change from a rupee...

Eight annas in the rupee

Ten annas in the rupee.

But it had nastier forms – the humor of the “Baboo,” the Indian above himself.

There was a young man from Darjeeling,
who got on a bus bound for Ealing:
It said on the door,
Don't spit on the floor.
So he carefully spat on the ceiling.

– anon.

Or

There was a young lady called Starky,
Who had an affair with a darky;
The result of her sins
Was quads and not twins:
One white and one black and two khaki.

– anon.

You can even find that mockery of would-be assimilators in Hugh Lofting's
The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle.

Our first introduction there to Prince Bumpo of Jolliginki is as an Oxford scholar, and it fits all the stereotypes of the black African on whom education is wasted.

To be fair, Bumpo is more than a clown. He's trustworthy, loyal, helpful

friendly, courteous, kind, obedient,
cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and – well, eleven out of
twelve Boy Scout qualities ain't bad.

And the Doctor, at least, never treats him as a menial, or an inferior, but as a friend.

Still, you can't get away from the opening scene, where Bumpo mangles the English language:

"News reached me," he said, "that you were about to sail upon a voyage. I hastened to see you before your departure. I am sublimely ecstasied that I did not miss you."

"You very nearly did miss us," said the Doctor. "As it happened, we were delayed somewhat in getting the necessary number of men to sail our boat."

"How many men does your ship's company yet require?" asked Bumpo.

"Only one," said the Doctor – "But it so hard to find the right one."

"Methinks I detect something of the finger of Destination in this," said Bumpo. "How would I do?"

"Splendidly," said the Doctor. "But what about your studies? You can't very well just go off and leave your university career to take care of itself, you know."

"I need a holiday," said Bumpo. "Even had I not gone with you, I intended at the end of this term to take a three-months' absconsion – But besides, I shall not be neglecting my edification if I accompany you. Before I left Jolliginki my August father, the King, told me to be sure and travel plenty. You are a man of great studiosity. To see the world in your company is an opportunity not to be sneezed upon. No, no, indeed."

"How did you like the life at Oxford?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, passably, passably," said Bumpo. "I liked it all except the algebra and the shoes. The algebra hurt my head and the shoes hurt my feet. I threw the shoes over the wall as soon as i got out of the college quadrilateral this morning; and the algebra I am happily forgetting very fast. I liked Cicero – yes, I think Cicero's fine – so

simultaneous. By the way, they tell me his son is rowing for our college next year – charming fellow.”

The Doctor looked down at the black man’s huge bare feet thoughtfully a moment.

“Well,” he said slowly, “there is something in what you say, Bumpo, about getting education from the world as well as from the college. And if you are really sure that you want to come, we shall be delighted to have you. Because, to tell you the truth, I think you are exactly the man we need.”⁹

Go to Hong Kong, and the lofty, well to do Peak was all European.’
Chinese weren’t allowed to live up there.

And when they were spoken to, it was in pidgin English,
a specially-built baby-ish gibberish form of English,

on the assumption that they couldn’t possibly learn
a grown-up kind of language

Go to the railroad service in India.

White engine drivers got 370 rupees a month, and ran the main-line
expresses.

Indian drivers got 20 rupees, and had to stick to branch-lines.

The Australian pearl-fisheries were for whites only.

The clubs were one of the places where prejudice showed clearest.

Committees running the clubs decided who were members.

And they drew the color line sharply.

⁹ Hugh Lofting, *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*, 149-50.

In most Indian cities where there were British, the clubs were for white people only.

The British caste system treated Indians with more ambivalence than a lot of others.

Indians knew how far British sneered at them as decadent and effete.

That was one reason why Hindus in Bengal took up gymnastics and wrestling.

Sports was very English and very manly.

It was also one reason why a British Resident, when he invited a young Indian schoolmaster to tea, was stood up.

The Indian accepted the invitation.

He just didn't show. Later he explained that he had other things to do.

It turned out that, as he saw it, the English sahib had done him enough kindness just by ASKING him to tea.

Accepting the invitation ... that was good manners.

Coming – that would have been presumptuous and improper.¹⁰

¹⁰ Edward Wakefield, *Past Imperative: My Life in India, 1927-1947* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), 9.

We can carry the whole idea of race prejudice too far, though.

As far as Indians were concerned, the English treated them a lot better than black people. They saw them as Something Other – but not so distantly.

They played cricket and let them play on their teams.

They let them serve as MP's in Parliament.

Indeed, India was the one place where the English let down the bars to race-mixing.

Anglo-Indians had been born and raised from the first days of the East India Company.

English women were hard to find, and costly to import.

So members of the Company shopped for a mistress locally.

... and for a wife, often enough.

The real recrimination didn't happen on the English side.

It was on the Hindu side, where a woman who married a European was cut off for keeps from the rest of her family.

She was out of caste.

She no longer was a member of the family.

But the children of an Indian woman could get along well in white society, and not just in India.

Some British officers were half-Indian.

Lord Roberts – “Bobs” – had a Rajput grandmother.

And the Tory Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool had an Indian grandmother, also.¹¹

... not to mention the children of Elihu Yale, governor of Madras, and the benefactor whose books gave Yale University its name –

¹¹ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *India Britannica* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 184.

His wife was Indian.¹²

Starting at the end of the 1700s, though, the free and easy mixing stopped being quite so easy.

The East India Company began to get nervous about mixed-bloods.

There were more of them in India than pure English.

It closed off the civil service to them, and most of the military ranks.

Every time there was a war or a crisis, it would call on every Anglo-Indian willing to shoulder a gun.

Without them, it hadn't a chance of winning.

But the moment victory was won, it sent them packing.

The Company wasn't the only force to blame. As sailing ships got more regular, men coming to England brought their wives.

As more English women arrived, it became more disreputable to have a brown wife – much less a mistress – much less still the 4 or 5 wives that some employees of the Company had taken up.¹³

After 1858, the Raj started to retreat from the exclusiveness.

¹² Geoffrey Moorhouse, *India Britannica* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 184.

¹³ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *India Britannica* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 185.

They welcomed Anglo-Indians into office.

Just about everyone working in the Posts and Telegraph Department was Anglo-Indian.

Most of the officers in Customs and Excise were, too.

And most of the people running the railways.

... the engine drivers –

... the guards...

... the stationmasters

... the inspectors¹⁴

But there was still that very strong sense of unassimilable races, running through the whole experience of empire.

Empire methods, when it came to dark-skinned people, were ruthless.

– “butcher and bolt” expeditions in the northwest frontiers of India

– but they were also done in Egypt and the Sudan.

– and, certainly, in Rhodesia.

“All over the place it was nothing but dead or dying niggers,” a British soldier wrote after one punitive expedition against the Ndebele:

¹⁴ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *India Britannica* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 188.

“We burnt all the huts and a lot of niggers that could not come out were burnt to death, and we could hear them screaming, but it served them right.”

And among the Pathans of northern India, the government handed out .303 and .457 ammunition to its firing squads, to see which was ballistically superior.