GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly apparent that scholars should be adopting a 'four-nation' approach not only to the pasts of the British and Hibernian Isles, but also to the history of the so-called British Empire. The separate strands of Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English influences and responses run through empire in highly illuminating ways. In many respects, the efforts to constitute a supposedly integrated set of 'British' institutions and territories transparently failed. These strands were of course interwoven with indigenous histories and made up a range of developing identities which were, like all identities, constantly in a state of flux and never fully constituted. The identities of the four 'home' nations were themselves modified in the process and, in the twenty-first century, still show marks of that imperial experience.

The affinities between Ireland and India have been much commented upon in the nineteenth-century context. Modes of governance, tenancy laws, famines, migrations, policing and military matters have all received attention. Rudyard Kipling was clearly fascinated by the role of the Irish in India and the relationship between the two, one small and the other vast, runs through his writings. He considered that they shared an adherence to the emotions, a sense of the supernatural, notions of a romantic sensibility, as well as powerful religious affiliations. In all of these they contrasted with the rational restraint and pragmatic practicality of the English. But what he considered to be their attractive characteristics could also be their undoing. For Kipling, there was a constant tension between good and bad Ireland and Irish, good and bad India and Indians. Yet he considered that each (notably the Irish in the military) could lead the other in the direction of what he considered to be the path of imperial righteousness. For him, the Irish were certainly both imperial and colonial.

Needless to say, they were much more likely to lead each other in quite another direction, that of nationalism and resistance. By the time of Kipling's death in 1936, he was inconsolably beached on the shores of hostile territories shaped by the political earthquakes of Anglo-Irish treaties and Government of India Acts. Meanwhile, political nationalism, as so often happens, had its precedents in literary connections. The phenomenon sometimes called 'Celtic Orientalism' had been represented in the relationship between W.B. Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore, only the most prominent of a range of similar reciprocal influences.

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All of this is well enough known, but Kate O'Malley moves these studies forward in new and exciting directions. The twentieth century, particularly the period after the First World War, has been much less studied. Using the remarkable files of the Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) department (barely noticed in studies of the secret services) she reveals an extraordinary set of connections among the personnel of Irish and Indian nationalism. Many prominent politicians viewed themselves as sharing similarities in historical tribulation and nationalist aspirations. They not only indulged in the emotional satisfaction of shared experiences, as they saw it, but also proposed the sharing of techniques (boycott for example), methods of agitation, the use of publications and the press, and the encouragement of joint organisations like the League Against Imperialism, the Indian-Irish Independence League, and the Friends of India Society. They also both recognised the significance of calling overseas settlements and ideologies to their aid – American Irish, South African Indians, communism, and the Axis powers.

Yet when all that has been said, we have to be cool in our assessment of the importance of all of this. Secret service organisations suffer in their nature from the paranoia that gives their activities meaning. As O'Malley reveals, the British services, including IPI, were much more obsessed with communism than with nationalism and were sometimes confused as a result. Gandhi was deeply suspicious of the Irish precedent because he saw it as representing a violent nationalism which he abjured. The connections between Irish political figures, including de Valera, and Subhas Chandra Bose were extensive and thoroughly intriguing, but the latter's connections with Germany, Russia and Japan during the Second World War have rendered his reputation controversial. Moreover, the two nationalist movements often seem to throw up a succession of shifting groups and alliances whose relative influence has to be assessed dispassionately. All this is covered eminently successfully and in addition, the book's highly original research demonstrates just how significant 'intra-colonial' relationships were. Very often, the really important developments in the associations of the British Empire were actually taking place outside of the direct, metropolitan imperial loop. This book adds a great deal to our understanding of these processes.

John M. MacKenzie