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Empire always seems to imply size, the bigness of ambition, of expansionist intent. But imperialism, the processes by which empire is created, is also related to locality. Empire resonates in the localities of the metropole as much as in the localities of the so-called periphery. This book is about those localities, on the one hand the piety and practices, the perceptions and prejudices of people in early nineteenth-century Wales, on the other the ways in which the religious ambitions of those same people operated upon the lives and ideas of indigenous societies of the distant Khasi Hills of north-eastern India. It is thus a study which embraces forms of micro-history by means of a set of micro-narratives, as the author himself calls them, but nonetheless these are micro-studies that operate within macro-contexts, the wider global formations of ever-extending British imperial rule in the period. While the region of north Wales and this specific portion of the territory of Assam are both small areas within a much larger geo-political whole, they were brought into an intersecting orbit by empire. The study of what happened when each came into contact with the other is the central objective of this book. It is set largely in the first half of the nineteenth century before British imperialism had reached its full ambitions, before nineteenth-century industrialism and its associated transport revolution had completely matured. And it seeks to show that aspects of 'marginality' in both geographical terms in respect of the United Kingdom and of India and in respect of the peoples involved, can offer significant insights into the global 'centrality' of the imperial condition.

At the heart of this story is a group of Welsh missionaries, eager to assert their own independent Welsh agency, at least in this evangelical missionary field. They represent the tendencies of so-called dissenting Protestantism to fragment, to attempt to create separate churches in some instances or to enter the missionary field with their own organisational structures, well connected to their contributing (in a variety of senses) society. Thus the essential development for this group of Methodist missionaries was the break with the London Missionary Society, the wider British movement which had significant links to Congregationalism. They wished to transport across the world a specifically Welsh form of Christian revelation; they desired to establish a missionary 'field' which would be tied to Welsh congregations and be seen to be very much the enterprise of that 'principality'. As well

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as carrying with them particular biblical and devotional forms of Christian enlightenment – as they would have seen it – they also transported specific linguistic and educational perceptions, rooted in their own Welsh language, its relationship with English, and the pedagogical practices of their own villages.

But if the Welsh missionaries are central to the story, they are by no means the only plot line. The author seeks to demonstrate the manner in which the Khasi Hills were 'unveiled' and opened up to imperial influences in a whole variety of ways – through the operations of scientific endeavour (for example in botany and plant collecting), through military encroachment, through the extension of the administrative tentacles of the East India Company, through ambitions to establish 'health resorts', not least for worn-out and sick members of the military, and also the exploitative urges in the search for economic crops and valuable resources, such as lime quarrying, and their related commercial endeavours. Thus the missionaries operated within wider contexts of the imperial advance. They were soon to suffer their own internal tensions between what was seen as correct and pious practice and what actually happened 'on the ground'. But their tensions were also tied into the multiple conflicts of commercial, administrative and military operations. Though the number of Europeans was relatively tiny, their internal as well as external conflicts were multiple and highly complex. Missionary and imperial ambitions were greatly complicated, and in some ways inhibited, as a result. The author seeks to identify and explain these many points of strain and resulting shakiness of the whole religious and imperial edifice. Ultimately, much of this instability and consequent destructiveness was to be perfectly symbolised by the great earthquake that occurred in the area in 1897. The mysterious operation of geological tectonic plates thus contributed to the many mysteries of human motivations and emotional crises, not all of which can be exposed from existing documents.

The intriguing thing is that both Welsh missionaries and Scottish military and administrative figures (prominent in the area) constructed the region as somehow familiar – an environment of hills, mists and rain which reminded them of Wales and Scotland respectively. Of course this territory of north-east India was ultimately nothing like Wales or Scotland. The botanical resources were very different, as was the geology and other natural historical phenomena. Moreover, its diseases, as was soon all too apparent, were far more dangerous to European life than anything experienced at 'home'. Hills, mists and rain did not mean health-giving conditions, as was often thought. Europeans who went there died almost as readily as they did on the Indian plains or in tropical Africa. Symmetrically, this was also true in reverse. The first

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person from the Khasi Hills to visit Wales and Britain, U Larsing, was to find the climate equally dangerous and tragically died in the course of his visit. It was to be some time before exchanges less inimical to the parties involved were to be effected. Yet, despite all the travails and deaths, the two areas were ineluctably drawn into a process of constructing each other. Welsh identity was partially formed through its sense of participating in global endeavours, not least religious, while the people of the Khasi Hills found themselves drawn into literacy and western forms of education and economic activity that were part of their involvement in the processes of modernity and globalisation.

While this is not, as the author asserts, a family history, it contains elements of the exploration of family connections and the flow of generational aspirations. Andrew May is himself related to the early principals of the Welsh missionary endeavour and fragmentary stories of this family past were lodged in the memories of some of his maternal ancestors. This gives the whole study added piquancy. But as May himself suggests, many elements were to remain a mystery, apparently incapable of being unveiled – perhaps only to be achieved through the operations of non-evidential imaginative reconstruction. But that is very likely work for the novelist rather than for the historian.

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