GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

British historians have long been anxious, for whatever reason, to separate domestic from colonial history. Recently, there has been a renewed effort to achieve this, with the publication of *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, an impressively researched book by a distinguished historian of the British Empire, Bernard Porter. Porter argues that, at least until the later nineteenth century, the British were indeed absent-minded about (for which read largely ignorant of and culturally indifferent towards) their empire. In the realms of both high and popular culture, the British had much more significant concerns, particularly those relating to class struggles, social issues, economic matters, and relations with non-imperial parts of the globe. In all of this, the English were possibly exceptional. Other states with smaller empires may have been more imperially minded, since their empires were more closely bound up with their sense of nationalism. Moreover, within Britain itself, it is conceivable that the Scots and the Irish were more enthusiastic about empire, and the opportunities it afforded for emigration, trade, and professional advancement, than the English.

The centrality of labour, social deprivation, trade and manufacturing, as well as diplomacy and war in British politics and culture cannot be gainsaid. But there seems little reason to see these as necessarily separated out from the imperial and colonial strand that runs through them. The 'Studies in Imperialism' series has for over twenty years been largely dedicated to the exposé of this imperial thread, to the proposal that in British history empire and domestic culture – in its widest sense – should be examined within the same analytical frame. Much of this work has concentrated (but not exclusively) on the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth when imperial linkages seemed to be operating most noticeably and effectively.

But now Zoë Laidlaw demonstrates the ways in which this core contention of the series can receive support from the colonial and imperial relationships in the early nineteenth century. Among other concerns, her book makes a significant contribution to the study of historical networking, revealing the extent to which military, professional, scientific, evangelical, and settler networks all operated in ways that recognised the centrality of London in imperial power-broking. The manipulation of social, familial, educational and other connections demonstrates the ways in which members of the bourgeoisie interacted with the upper class and with each other. Her analysis also confirms the manner in which the army, the missionary lobby, scientists, map-makers, and statisticians, among others, conducted their activities in such a way that the colonial dimension was a vital conditioner and energiser of a good deal of their interests. Domestic and colonial matters were often closely intertwined as policies were pushed forward into new dispensations. And although these affairs might on the face of it appear to involve a relatively small number of people, they unavoidably made an impression upon wider cultural and social, religious and political concerns.

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Laidlaw's book throws light on many other aspects of the colonial–metropolitan relationship, on developments within the Colonial Office (encapsulating a significant revision of the standard view), on pressure groups and lobbies, upon forms of patronage, and upon the information and statistical revolution that developed in the 1830s. Moreover, she escapes from earlier historians' concerns with a single colony by developing an illuminating comparison between the Cape and New South Wales. All of this is based upon remarkably extensive research in the United Kingdom, in South Africa, and in Australia. These comparative approaches, already illustrated in several books within this series, will no doubt be extended yet further in the future. Moreover, she implicitly suggests the existence of further networks, based upon ethnic affiliation (for example, the Scots and the Irish), on professionals and their associations, on missionary societies, and much else. All the best research is suggestive research and one of the considerable qualities of this book is the manner in which further ideas and areas for consideration and analysis are opened up to the reader.

John M. MacKenzie