

**THE IMPERIALISM OF CECIL JOHN RHODES:
METROPOLITAN PERCEPTIONS OF A COLONIAL REPUTATION**

By

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Abstract

Cecil John Rhodes, the British mining-magnate, politician, and empire builder, epitomised the dynamism and controversy of late-nineteenth century imperialism. In his time he was regarded as a towering figure of the age, not only in Britain and its colonial empire, but throughout the world. He cast a long shadow into the twentieth century, through associates who helped to create the Union of South Africa as a self-governing dominion, as well as eponymously through his legacy in the politics and infrastructure of Rhodesia and the wider subcontinent. When this thesis was conceived it was not anticipated that Rhodes and his reputation would again become matters of controversy, as they have emerged in South Africa in the #RhodesMustFall movement in 2015 which latterly has extended to Oxford, where his architectural legacy has become controversial. This renewed interest provides further testimony to his stature, although, as originally intended, this study will be confined to his career and immediately posthumous reputation.

This thesis will chart the rise, fall, and recovery of Rhodes's reputation as it appeared to British public opinion. The thesis aims to explore the myths which have enveloped Rhodes and provoked an often distorted understanding of the man and his motivations. It will trace the origins and development of these myths, assessing their accuracy and their ideological foundations. It need hardly be stated that this thesis is not intended as an apologia for Rhodes, or for late-nineteenth century imperialism, but rather to re-examine both within their historical context. In addition, the thesis will provide a contemporary perspective on events of such historical significance as the founding of Rhodesia, the Jameson Raid, and the immediate reaction to the Rhodes scholarships.

In a broader sense this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge concerned with how the British themselves viewed their Empire, and to reintegrate the imperial experience within

the wider context of British social and cultural history. In this thesis Cecil Rhodes, the man and his works, are utilised as a prism through which to view more closely British attitudes towards the empire.

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Introduction

Cecil Rhodes was a British-born mining magnate and colonial statesman, who in his short career stretched the frontiers of the British Empire in Africa from Cape Colony to the Zambesi River; widely regarded by contemporaries as a colossus – a pun on the statue of antiquity – whose dream of trans-African railways made him the symbol of Victorian imperialism.

Rhodes was not only, almost certainly, the most famous Englishman of his generation; he was also the most controversial. His friend, the journalist W.T. Stead, wrote of Rhodes: 'There is no man who has loomed more conspicuously before the public for years past about whom there are so many diametrically opposite opinions.'¹

To his supporters Rhodes was an imperial genius whose ability to reconcile the white races at the Cape appeared destined to lay the foundations of South African federation. In a broader sense he was credited with having shaken the British people out of a 'creeping lethargy' and for having bid her statesmen 'not to be afraid to possess the earth'.² He was a pioneer, carving out new countries for British trade and emigration, and a humanitarian, whose imperial schemes had extended the blessings of civilization to the benighted peoples of Africa.

To his opponents Rhodes was a duplicitous colonial politician whose near dictatorial power over South Africa had been employed to bully and coerce imperial officials at home; a self-serving opportunist, who had harnessed the generational enthusiasm for imperial expansion and made it sub-serve his own business interests. Moreover, he was accused of having lowered British standards of morality in the single-minded pursuit of his imperial ambitions. On the occasion of his death *The Times* observed that

¹ *Review of Reviews*, June 1900, p.588.

² *Saturday Review*, 5 April 1902, pp.420-421.

Rhodes had met the fate which attends all empire-builders, namely to be loved and reviled in equal measure, and 'in exact proportion to the size of their achievements'.³

As a comparatively inarticulate man of action who achieved his great feats of nation building in a distant corner of the empire, Rhodes the man struck many in Britain as a 'sombre and incomplete outline'.⁴ Consequently, both his ideology and motivations were open to repeated and often deliberate misconstruction. In one of his many attempts to clarify Rhodes's intentions W.T. Stead admitted: 'It does not matter much what people say about me, but it does matter a very great deal what estimate they form of Mr Rhodes.'⁵ It is the assertion of this thesis that contemporaries both 'loved and reviled' Rhodes less for who he was, than for what he represented. As the embodiment of late nineteenth century imperialism, contemporaries vehemently contested Rhodes's reputation in the understanding that - as one German newspaper noted - his very name had become 'a programme in Africa and England'.⁶

The battle for Rhodes's reputation is still being waged, though the nature of the debate has shifted. Even the most generous construction of his ideology, namely that of patriarchal imperialism, would find few sympathisers today. The accusations of his modern critics, while more closely approximating the views of their Victorian counterparts, have also undergone a marked transformation, evolving from charges of unscrupulousness and economic self-interest, to accusations of racism, slavery, and genocide. Today the division is not between advocates and critics, but between those who would expunge his name from the national conscience, and those who would preserve for him a place in the annals of our modern history.

³ *The Times*, 27 March 1902, p.7.

⁴ *Monthly Review*, May 1902, pp.1-9.

⁵ *Review of Reviews*, May 1902, p.471.

⁶ Comment by *Fremden-Blatt*, published by *The Times*, 17 March 1899, p.5.

This thesis will chart the rise, fall, and recovery of Rhodes's reputation as it appeared to British public opinion. The thesis aims to explore the myths which have enveloped Rhodes and provoked an often distorted understanding of the man and his motivations. It will trace the origins and development of these myths, assessing their accuracy and their ideological foundations. It need hardly be stated that this thesis is not intended as an apologia for Rhodes, or for late-nineteenth century imperialism, but rather to re-examine both within their historical context. Neither is it a conventional biography but the study of a reputation. In addition, the thesis will provide a contemporary perspective on events of such historical significance as the founding of Rhodesia, the Jameson Raid, and the immediate reaction to the Rhodes scholarships.

In a broader sense this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge concerned with how the British themselves viewed their Empire, and to reintegrate the imperial experience within the wider context of British social and cultural history. In this thesis Cecil Rhodes, the man and his works, are utilised as a prism through which to view more closely British attitudes towards the empire. In this way it seeks to ascertain whether it is possible to identify, as MacKenzie asserts, the existence of an 'ideological cluster', which formed the bedrock of late nineteenth century society; an ideology infused with an adoration for national heroes, militarism, and racial ideas associated with Social Darwinism.⁷

Rhodes has been the subject of over 50 biographies, numerous articles, and academic theses, however, few of these have paid significant attention to his reputation. Mordechai Tamarkin has touched upon this issue from the perspective of Rhodes's relationship with the Cape Afrikaners,⁸ and both Donal Lowry and Paul Maylam have considered his posthumous reputation; Lowry in

⁷ MacKenzie John M. *Propaganda and Empire*, Manchester University Press 2003, p.2.

⁸ Tamarkin, Mordechai, *Cecil Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1996.

the context of his memorialization in Rhodesia, South Africa, and Oxford,⁹ and Maylam by charting the transformation of his reputation during the twentieth century.¹⁰

In a broader sense this thesis draws inspiration from the recent work of John M. MacKenzie¹¹ and Bernard Porter,¹² who have considered the Empire's place in the Victorian consciousness; the works of Andrew S. Thompson, which have considered the Empire's impact upon British politics,¹³ and upon the lived experience of empire;¹⁴ and more specific texts such as David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism*, which has explored perceptions of race and class within an imperial context,¹⁵ and Kathryn Tidrick's study of the Empire's impact upon the English character.¹⁶ It also seeks to build upon earlier works by Ernest Barker,¹⁷ Richard Faber,¹⁸ Bernard Porter,¹⁹ and A.P. Thornton,²⁰ which have sought to provide a broad ideological understanding of both the imperial idea and its enemies.

The aforementioned works have largely adopted what may be termed an 'official mind' approach to British perceptions of the empire, by considering the ideologies of the political and intellectual elite. This thesis, in contrast, seeks to represent the opinions of a broad range of contemporary commentators whose perceptions of Rhodes and the empire were accessible to the widest possible

⁹ Lowry, Donal, *The Granite of the ancient North: race, nation and empire at Cecil Rhodes's mountain mausoleum and Rhodes House, Oxford*, in Richard Wrigley and Matthew Craske (eds.) *Pantheons: Transformations of a Monumental Idea*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2004.

¹⁰ Maylam, Paul, *The Cult of Rhodes*, David Philip Publishers, Cape Town, 2005.

¹¹ MacKenzie John M. *Propaganda and Empire*, Manchester University Press 2003, p.2.

¹² Porter, Bernard, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, Oxford University Press, 2007, first published 2004.

¹³ Thompson, Andrew S., *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics: 1880-1932*, Longman-Pearson, Harlow, 2000.

¹⁴ Thompson, Andrew S., *The Empire Strikes Back?* Routledge, New York, 2014.

¹⁵ Cannadine, David, *Ornamentalism*, Penguin, London, 2002.

¹⁶ Tidrick, Kathryn, *Empire and the English Character*, I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., London, 1992, first published 1990.

¹⁷ Barker, Ernest, *The Ideas and Ideals of the British Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 1941.

¹⁸ Faber, Richard, *The Vision and the Need*, Faber and Faber, London, 1966.

¹⁹ Porter, Bernard, *Critics of Empire*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2008, first published by Macmillan, 1968.

²⁰ Thornton, A.P. *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, Macmillan, London, 1966.

audience and were available in real-time. Moreover, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how the ideological influences of the age found physical expression in the career of the foremost proponent of the imperial idea.

The chapters of this thesis represent a series of case studies, arranged in chronological order, and designed to facilitate analysis of the most historically significant and controversial aspects of Rhodes's career as they appeared to British public opinion.

Chapters one and two will consider Rhodes's first appearance on the British political stage. As a virtually unknown colonial politician he was brought to national attention in the mid-1880s, first in connection with the Imperial Government's annexation of Bechuanaland, and then in connection with a donation he had made to the campaign funds of the Irish Nationalist politician, Charles Stewart Parnell. In the years that followed recollections of Rhodes's actions would lead to accusations of duplicity, corruption, and ideological inconsistency, enabling critics such as the economist J.A. Hobson to question his commitment to imperialism, and proffer less altruistic motivations for his actions. In tracing the origins of these myths this chapter will assess the accuracy of charges which have plagued Rhodes's reputation to the present day. In a broader imperial sense the chapter will consider the issue of Home Rule, imperial unity, and Britain's changing relationship with her colonial empire.

The third chapter discusses Rhodes's acquisition of a Royal Charter to exploit the mineral wealth of Zambesia, and the establishment of the British South Africa Company for this purpose. In doing so Rhodes laid the foundations of a new imperial province which would later bear his name. The chapter considers the changing perception of the African interior as the nineteenth century drew to a close, discussing its transformation in the national consciousness from an unprofitable desert, inhabited by inhospitable tribes, to a new Eldorado – rich in minerals, and eminently desirable

as a field for European emigration. It will consider the expectations of late-Victorian imperialists as they surveyed the interior of the continent and considered the prospects of a new African Empire, and the attitudes of critics who saw only an 'African mirage'. The chapter also examines contemporary attitudes to Rhodes's brand of privatised imperialism, to chartered companies as instruments of imperial expansion - the opportunities they presented and the dangers they posed.

Chapter four assesses the British reaction to the Matabele War, a conflict which epitomised the ruthlessness of the African Scramble, and which brought the moral and humanitarian implications of late-nineteenth century imperialism into contemporary focus. It also charts the evolution of Rhodes's reputation from imperial footnote to colonial statesman. In doing so it considers the British response to his increasingly dictatorial power in South Africa, its potential application in the cause of imperial unity, and the inherent danger of reposing such colossal powers in a 'machine-gun politician' of questionable loyalties.²¹

Chapter five commences with Rhodes at the zenith of his powers, celebrated as an imperial genius whose foresight and sagacity had added a rich new province to the empire, and whose talent for diplomacy had conciliated the Dutch Afrikaners at the Cape and seemingly laid the foundations for South African federation under imperial auspices. It assesses the impact of the ill-fated Jameson Raid on Rhodes's reputation, the repercussions of which would ultimately deprive him of his official positions.

More significantly, the chapter seeks to demonstrate the extent to which British perceptions of the Raid were largely determined by external events, how the fallout was successfully contained by Rhodes's allies in Britain, and how in public perceptions a humiliating failure was transformed into a selfless act of patriotism.

²¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1893, p.6.

It discusses Rhodes's perceived necessity to the empire, and the willingness of British politicians to sacrifice considerations of legality and morality in defence of broader imperial objectives. It assesses to what extent support for Rhodes was dependent upon his own cult of personality, and to what extent imperial interests determined the national reaction. The Raid also provides a case study as to the contemporary treatment of imperial heroes – their panegyrists and their detractors. Moreover, it assesses contemporary attitudes as to the implications of the Raid for Rhodes, and the British Empire.

Chapters six and seven chart the recovery of Rhodes's reputation in the aftermath of the Raid. In the case of the Matabele rebellion it demonstrates how Rhodes and his associates succeeded in manipulating public opinion in Britain to represent him once more as the indispensable imperial hero. It seeks to examine Mordechai Tamarkin's contention that Rhodes's grandstanding in the aftermath of the rebellion was more damaging to Anglo-Boer relations than the Raid itself, by complementing his analysis of this issue from a South African perspective with that of the British. The contemporary treatment of the Jameson Raid inquiry demonstrates how Rhodes was able to evade the barbs of his British critics and emerge from his 'one great error' with a character reference from the Colonial Secretary.

The culmination of Rhodes's recovery was marked by the arrival of the railway in the Rhodesian town of Bulawayo. As a symbol of Victorian progress and modernity the railway was unsurpassed. Contemporary reactions to its arrival in Bulawayo are used to illustrate British conceptions of the 'civilising' mission in Africa, and the perceived benevolence of late-nineteenth century imperialism.

Chapter eight will consider Rhodes's later career, death, and immediate posthumous reputation. An analysis of his failed political comeback at the Cape seeks to demonstrate the extent to which imperial interests predominated over any personal sense of loyalty to

Rhodes in British assessments of the developing crisis in South Africa.

In considering Rhodesia's offer of a preferential tariff to the Imperial Government, the chapter will seek to illustrate the economic considerations which underpinned much of the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the era, notably the extent to which Liberal adherence to the policy of Free Trade formed an ideological opposition to the concept of imperial federation. Economic grounds for opposing empire are developed later in the chapter in reference to the allegations that Rhodes was the instigator of a capitalist plot to manoeuvre Britain into war against the Boers in 1899. In addition to assessing the validity of these claims, it will seek to demonstrate how cotemporary critics formed a link between imperial 'despotism abroad, and aristocratic recrudescence at home'.²²

The occasion of Rhodes's honorary degree from the University of Oxford provides further evidence as to the durability of his reputation among contemporaries, while his actions at the siege of Kimberley provide further evidence of his talent for self-publicity on the one hand, and his habit of courting controversy on the other.

Contemporary reaction to both his Cape to Cairo railway scheme and the vaulting ambition of his last will and testament epitomise both the idealism of late-nineteenth century imperialism and its inability to reconcile the vision and the reality.

Finally, in drawing upon contemporary perceptions of Rhodes this thesis will seek to identify correlations between the cultural values of late-Victorian Britain and their exemplification in the guise of this pre-eminent imperialist. In this way the thesis will consider to what extent was Rhodes representative of his generation; to what extent were the influences acting upon him innovative – derived from the latest scientific and philosophical advances of the age – and to what extent

²² *Contemporary Review*, June 1899, pp.782-799.

did they represent the continuation of earlier manifestations of cultural hubris.

Chapter 1

'Rather a Pro-Boer?'

Cecil Rhodes and the Annexation of Bechuanaland

It is difficult to determine the precise moment when Cecil John Rhodes first entered the consciousness of the British people. When he arrived in Britain in 1889 to secure a Royal Charter for his British South Africa Company, it has been stated that he was an 'object of some mystery', and a man of questionable loyalties.¹ As a Member of the Cape Parliament and as the great amalgamator of the Kimberley diamond mines, he had established himself as a man of considerable importance in South Africa during the 1880s, yet in England he remained comparatively unknown.

For much of that decade the name Rhodes was little more than a footnote in the British press, relevant only to those with an interest in the mining industry or colonial politics. To the extent that Rhodes's name was familiar to his countrymen it was as the man who had sought to exclude the 'Imperial factor' from Bechuanaland in 1885 and for the large contribution he had made to the campaign funds of the Irish Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell. It has been stated that the former action garnered him a negative press in Britain,² while his donation to Parnell raised questions as to his loyalties which have persisted to the present day.³

While there can be little doubt that Rhodes's early associations aroused suspicions in Britain, and in certain cases garnered him influential enemies, an examination of contemporary public sources reveals that the first impressions Rhodes made upon his countrymen were perhaps less 'mysterious' and less 'suspicious' than has been assumed. And that, in fact, observant contemporaries would have been able to derive a far more accurate understanding of Rhodes's

¹ Rotberg, Robert I., *The Founder*, Oxford University Press 1988, pp.274-275; also p.164.

² Lockhart, J.G., and Woodhouse, C.M., *Rhodes*, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., London 1963, p.100.

³ Thomas, Antony, *Rhodes*, BBC Books, London 1996, p.210.

imperial ambitions, and at an earlier date, than has typically been acknowledged.

Both incidents appeared to betray sympathy for the enemies of imperial unity, be they the Dutch population in South Africa or the Irish nationalists at home. Certainly later in his career these early impressions proved a useful resource to critics who wished to blacken Rhodes's reputation by casting aspersions as to his loyalties and motivations. Even his status as an Imperialist would be questioned by those seeking to cast Rhodes as a 'pro-Boer', or as a self-serving opportunist, inclined to jettison his imperial loyalties the moment it served his purpose.⁴ It hardly seems necessary to reiterate the inaccuracy of these assumptions. By the time of his death even perennial critics had largely abandoned such vague and unsubstantiated charges. His more even-handed biographers have followed suit, even if there remain those willing to perpetuate the myth.

In 1884 Rhodes was a wealthy businessman with a large stake in the diamond industry at Kimberley. He was also a member of the Cape Assembly representing the rural constituency of Barkly West. In common with many of his countrymen, both at home and in South Africa, he had begun to cast his eyes beyond the frontiers of the Cape Colony towards the vast and potentially lucrative interior of the African Continent. The territory of Bechuanaland lying to the immediate north of the Cape Colony was considered to be of little material value, however, the land which lay beyond - between the Limpopo and the Zambezi Rivers - was considered to be highly mineralised, and with its temperate climate and high tablelands, a region eminently suited to European emigration. Rhodes understood that the northern territory not only represented the Cape Colony's

⁴ *National Review*, April 1900, pp.228-239; also *Speaker*, 30 November 1901, pp.245-246.

hinterland but a counterpoise to the territorial ambitions of Britain's imperial rivals.⁵

The future Rhodes envisaged both for the Cape Colony and for the Empire appeared threatened in 1882 when pioneers from the Transvaal crossed the western frontier and founded two satellite republics in the seemingly valueless territory of Bechuanaland. Dismayed at these developments Rhodes petitioned both the Imperial Government and his colleagues at the Cape to secure this 'Suez Canal' of the interior.

In this endeavour Rhodes received the unwitting assistance of the Rev. John Mackenzie, an influential missionary whose appeals to the Imperial Government to protect the Bechuana tribes had won considerable public support in Britain. Rhodes's warnings also benefited from the actions of the German Government, whose unexpected annexation of a vast swathe of South-West Africa in 1884 had finally persuaded the Imperial Government of the need to act, lest the Cape be cut off from the untold riches of the interior. Having determined to exclude its imperial rivals from Bechuanaland, the question for the Imperial Government now turned upon whether Britain or the Cape Colony was to be responsible for its administration.

Rhodes was ruled by practical as opposed to ideological considerations. His priority was to ensure that the road to the north remained open, and whether this meant the creation of a British protectorate or the annexation of Bechuanaland by the Cape Colony, the accomplishment of this primary objective superseded all other considerations.⁶ Nevertheless, it would appear that his own preference was for 'Colonialism', that is to say for the expansion of the Empire to be affected by the colonists themselves, and not by the Imperial Government. This was certainly the view of his friend and

⁵ Robinson, Ronald and Gallagher, John with Denny, Alice, *Africa and the Victorians*, MacMillan Press Ltd., London 1978, first edition 1961, pp.210-254.

⁶ Rotberg, pp.159-160.

first biographer John Verschoyle, who pointed to a speech of June 1887 in which Rhodes appeared to make this case.⁷

The Imperial Government, having resolved to secure the route to the interior, despatched a strong expeditionary force commanded by Sir Charles Warren to restore order in the disputed territory. Warren was accompanied by the Rev. John Mackenzie; together they shared a belief in humanitarian imperialism derived from the benevolent rule of Westminster, and an antipathy towards the settler community. Rhodes, in contrast, was willing to support the settlers' rights if this would lead to a favourable resolution.

Prior to Warren's arrival Rhodes had been sent to Bechuanaland by the Cape Government in-order that a compromise might be reached with the new republics. In-order to secure their fidelity Rhodes had guaranteed to uphold the trekker's land titles - which included territory confiscated from the Bechuana tribes - if they would declare their loyalty to Britain. This action drew the censure of humanitarian opinion and placed Rhodes on a collision course with Warren and Mackenzie.

Rhodes's subsequent resignation from Bechuanaland, in which he cited irreconcilable differences with the imperial officials, in addition to his continuing opposition to Warren's methods - which ultimately resulted in the latter's controversial recall to London - had apparently created in the public mind the impression of Rhodes as a 'pro-Boer' colonial, an opponent of the 'imperial factor', and a violator of African rights. But was this the British public's earliest impression of Rhodes, and the reputation he would bring with him to London in 1889 in pursuit of the charter?

There was immense public sympathy for Warren and Mackenzie; after a long period of vacillation the Imperial Government had at last

⁷ 'Vindex' (pseud. John Verschoyle) *Cecil Rhodes: His Political Life and Speeches, 1881-1900*, Chapman and Hall Ltd., London 1900, pp.xxix-xxxv. See also the speech of 23 June 1887, pp.149-166.

intervened decisively in the 'African Scramble'. It was unsurprising, therefore, that the British people should recognise in these Imperial officers the embodiment of a highly anticipated imperial forward policy in Africa. The characters of the two men - their sense of moral purpose and renowned African sympathies - endowed the mission with the welcome gloss of selfless humanitarianism. They would not only guard Britain's national interests, but would fulfil the essential moral obligations of establishing order and instituting a stable administration.

Warren had received a rapturous welcome upon his arrival in South Africa. As one contemporary later recalled: 'He was for the moment the embodiment of a policy of action which was felt to be sorely wanted.'⁸ He also carried with him the goodwill of the British press. The *Pall Mall Gazette* had described him as 'one of the most conscientious and public-spirited of men...the best officer we can find';⁹ the *Manchester Guardian* would subsequently praise him for his firm and conciliatory attitude in what the journal admitted to be an 'extremely ticklish affair',¹⁰ and at a meeting of Cape merchants in London he was hailed for having carried out his work 'efficiently, wisely, and speedily'.¹¹ An attendee of the meeting insisted that 'This was no party question'; rather, 'it had taken hold of the popular mind', with 'both Conservatives and Liberals united in one feeling...that if we were to preserve South Africa at all we must have no vacillating policy, but a firm and just policy.'¹² Echoing these sentiments the *Daily News* declared: 'We believe that the unanimous desire of the public here is that...Sir C. Warren should be free to carry out the policy he set forth in England...'¹³ Having finally provoked a reaction from the Imperial Government there seemed to be a collective

⁸ Williams, Ralph C., *The British Lion in Bechuanaland*, Rivington's, London 1885, pp.27-28.

⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 March 1885, p.1.

¹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1885, p.5.

¹¹ *Daily News*, 17 September 1885, p.2.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*: 9 March 1885, p.5.

willingness to resist any opposition which threatened to halt the forward momentum.

Rumours of the 'rupture' between Rhodes and Warren received a wide circulation in the British press in the spring of 1885. It would be later in the year, however, in light of both Rhodes's resignation and Warren's recall to London, that details of the rift would become public.

Throughout the autumn-winter of 1885 a running publicity battle would ensue between Warren and Mackenzie on one side, and Rhodes and his associates on the other. The first salvo in this exchange had been the publication of a pamphlet entitled *The British Lion in Bechuanaland*.¹⁴ Its author was Ralph Williams, Warren's former intelligence officer, and a Rhodes ally. Williams attacked Warren and Mackenzie for their prejudicial attitudes and authoritarian policies, which he maintained had alienated the loyal burghers of South Africa, swelled the ranks of the Afrikaner party at the Cape, and roused a 'storm of indignation in every Dutch heart'.¹⁵

Though Williams attributed much of the praise for saving the trade route to Sir Hercules Robinson, the High Commissioner of South Africa, it was acknowledged that Rhodes's settlement and his conciliatory attitude towards the Dutch settlers had been instrumental in its preservation. Warren and Mackenzie had sought to govern 'as [the] iron rulers of a discontented people', Williams had argued, while Robinson and Rhodes had recognised the need 'to attract rather than to repel local influences'.¹⁶ Williams's pamphlet was serialised in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in June 1885, triggering a war of words in the British press which would continue into the New Year.¹⁷

The initial response arrived in the form of a series of anonymous letters penned by 'a correspondent with Sir Charles Warren', which

¹⁴ Op. cit.

¹⁵ Williams, Ralph C., p59.

¹⁶ Ibid: p.49.

¹⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 June 1885, p.11; and Friday 19 June 1885, p.11.

were also serialised in the *Gazette*.¹⁸ This anonymous correspondent, later identified by Williams as Mackenzie himself,¹⁹ accused Rhodes and his associates of a 'private conspiracy to hoodwink the public', of having condoned the actions of the Boer filibusters, and of 'whitewashing' their leader - the latter having shown himself to be 'the arch-enemy...of the English Government in Bechuanaland'.²⁰ In his attempt to curry favour with the Dutch settlers Rhodes was accused of having 'virtually resigned the protectorate' into their hands',²¹ and of having 'kept out of sight' the fact that in one of the satellite republics (Stellaland), there had been a significant body of support for the continuation of direct imperial rule.²²

By the autumn the debate had attracted new participants, and the focus of attention had shifted from the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to those of *The Times*. For Rhodes the autumn communications would bring fresh charges of impropriety. The colonial politician, who, in favouring local rule had sought to conciliate Boer freebooters and allegedly exclude the 'Imperial factor' from Bechuanaland, would be charged with the effective confiscation of African tribal lands in-order to appease his Dutch fellow-colonists.

In September Frederick Chesson, Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society, wrote a letter to *The Times* in which he explained that the settlers in the satellite republic of Stellaland had allocated more land in their registry than they had to bestow, with the result that if Rhodes's agreement with the settlers was upheld, the new farms would 'run right over the lands' pledged to the African chiefs.²³ In a second letter Chesson stated categorically that in his opinion Rhodes's settlement with the Stellalanders had granted them 'about half as much land again as they would have received under Mr

¹⁸ Ibid: 4 September 1885, pp.1-2; and 7 September 1885, p.6.

¹⁹ Ibid: 7 September 1885, p.2; also Ibid: 19 September 1885, pp.1-2.

²⁰ Ibid: 4 September 1885, pp.1-2 (p.2).

²¹ Ibid: 7 September 1885, p.6; see also Ibid: 16 September 1885, pp.1-2.

²² Ibid: 7 September 1885, p.6.

²³ *The Times*, 22 September 1885, p.13.

Mackenzie's agreement', and that this agreement would involve the forfeiture of African lands.²⁴

Chesson's second letter was written in reply to a defence of Rhodes proffered by the latter's associate Ralph Williams. Williams had argued that Rhodes's agreement contained an important proviso, namely that the land titles would be upheld subject 'to a proper definition of the boundaries of Stellaland'. He insisted that Rhodes had allegedly warned:

If you have chosen to award farms in Moshette's country to the north, and in Mankoroane's country to the south, outside your own boundaries, you have given what was not yours to give; and I tell you fairly that I will not advise that either of those chiefs be mulcted of lands to satisfy such claims.²⁵

In the meantime Sir Charles Warren had been recalled from Bechuanaland by the Imperial Government, ostensibly on the grounds that his original mission to restore order, reinstate the Africans on their lands, and establish a rudimentary administration, had been achieved. It was rumoured, however, that he had been recalled at the instigation of concerned officials both in London and at the Cape, and that in his commitment to both the establishment of direct imperial rule and in the safeguarding of African interests, he had overstepped his remit.

There was little appetite in official circles for the establishment of a costly administration in Bechuanaland, and Warren's notion of excluding Dutch settlers from the territory not only threatened race relations in South Africa, but appeared to remove any prospect of the Cape Colony easing the strain on the British exchequer by assuming

²⁴ Ibid: 30 September 1885, p.6.

²⁵ Ibid: 28 September 1885, p.4.

responsibility for Bechuanaland.²⁶ In the event northern Bechuanaland would remain a British Protectorate, while the south - including both Stellaland and Goshen - became the Crown Colony of Bechuanaland, the latter being transferred to the administration of the Cape Colony in 1895.

Warren's recall occasioned considerable alarm in Britain as it appeared to indicate a backward step in imperial policy. At a public meeting of Cape merchants in London it was moved 'That in the opinion of this meeting the recall of Sir Charles Warren cannot be other than prejudicial to the political and commercial interests of South Africa.'²⁷ *The Times* echoed these concerns stating that Warren had only laid the foundations of a satisfactory settlement in Bechuanaland, and that the substructure remained to be built. In his absence it was suspected that the squabbling factions would once again plunge the country into anarchy.²⁸

It is important to acknowledge that in Britain Warren's ideological rival was considered to be Robinson, not Rhodes. As High Commissioner, Robinson was the more conspicuous personage, it was rumoured that he had been principally responsible for opposing Warren's 'civilising mission' and for engineering his recall. It was suspected, however, that Robinson was acting under the direction of others. Not for the last time Rhodes would be accused of being the power behind the throne.

At the protest meeting in London one of the delegates linked Rhodes's name with that of Robinson's in questioning who had been responsible for Warren's 'ousting'. Another delegate, Sir William

²⁶ Speaking to the London Chamber of Commerce Warren attempted to clarify his position regarding the exclusion of Dutch settlers from Bechuanaland. In doing so he explained that the African chiefs had expressed their desire that only British subjects be permitted to settle in the country. Warren stated that while he was sympathetic to this request it was not his proposal. In conclusion, however, he argued that 'our Protectorate would be a mere sham if we used it but as a cloak for forcing filibusters upon the native tribes'. See *The Times*, 22 October 1885, p.7.

²⁷ *Daily News*, 17 September 1885, p.2.

²⁸ *The Times*, 17 September 1885, p.7.

McArthur, surmised that Robinson 'must have been under unhappy influence. He must have been badly guided and directed, or he would not have taken that course'.²⁹ Rhodes's culpability for the dismissal of this paragon of Imperial virtue was strengthened still further as details of their disputes filtered back to Britain. An occasional correspondent for *The Times* reported that far from having resigned, Rhodes had in fact been dismissed from his role in Bechuanaland at Warren's insistence, the latter citing charges of insubordination.³⁰

It was at this juncture that the proxy war came to an end and the principal antagonists joined the fray. Upon his return to London Warren finally broke his silence on affairs in Bechuanaland. Feted by the Royal Colonial Institute and the London Chamber of Commerce, he would use these opportunities to justify his own actions while censuring the methods of others. In the course of these speeches Rhodes once again found himself cast as the colonial politician eager to exclude the 'Imperial factor' on the grounds that such an authority would not permit the settlers to ride rough-shod over the rights of the indigenous population.³¹ This perception of Rhodes also found representation in the British press, a description in the *Manchester Guardian* from this time demonstrates the manner in which Rhodes was thought to have set about his work in Bechuanaland, as very much a creature of the Cape Assembly:

...Mr Rhodes...went up in the character of the local man, representative of the ideas current in the Cape Parliament - a predominantly Dutch assembly, - and not inclined to be either too tender with the natives or too considerate of what Cape politicians are wont to call the "Imperial factor".³²

In his published letters Warren portrayed Rhodes hauling down the Union Jack and raising the flag of Stellaland in its place, of cancelling the benevolent acts of the Rev. Mackenzie, and of giving away all the land in the local chief's register. '...it is impossible to

²⁹ *Daily News*, 17 September 1885, p.2.

³⁰ *The Times*, 17 October 1885, p.4.

³¹ *Ibid*: 22 October 1885, p.7; also 11 November 1885, p.7.

³² *Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1885, p.5.

carry out Mr Rhodes's agreement', Warren had complained, 'without the grossest injustice being done to the native tribes and without the guarantee of the Secretary of State being broken'.³³

Warren maintained that opposition to both himself and Mackenzie reflected a broader anti-imperial sentiment among Cape ministers, and in doing so referenced a speech Rhodes had made before the Assembly, in which he appeared to call for the exclusion of the 'Imperial factor', as a case in point. Warren sought to demonstrate that this anti-imperial attitude extended to the very top by accusing the High Commissioner of consistently meddling in his affairs - both civil and military - and of having despatched Rhodes to Bechuanaland to further frustrate his progress.

It was this opposition to imperial influence, Warren argued, that lay behind Rhodes's cancellation of Mackenzie's acts in Stellaland, and the re-institution of that republic. While Warren credited Rhodes with the foresight of having recognised Bechuanaland's strategic significance, this, he insisted, had been 'entirely with reference to the Cape Colony alone, and not with regard to the interests of the British Empire'.³⁴ This highlights a recurring theme in Warren's censure of Rhodes, namely the charge of duplicity. 'There he was all for the colony as against the Empire', Warren argued, 'here he is all for the Empire...This running with the hare and hunting with the hounds should be exposed.'³⁵

The day after Warren's speech at the Royal Colonial Institute a voluminous letter from Rhodes was published in *The Times* defending both his record in Bechuanaland and his credentials as a

³³ *The Times*, Sir C. Warren, 14 December 1885, p.12.

³⁴ *Ibid*: Sir C. Warren, 17 November 1885, p.8.

³⁵ *Ibid*. Sir C. Warren, 14 December 1885, p.12.

loyal imperialist. It triggered a war of words between the two men which would only end with Rhodes's return to South Africa.³⁶

In reply Rhodes explained that he had been reluctant to involve himself with the affairs of Bechuanaland, conscious of how his actions there would be open to misconstruction. In his letters to *The Times* Rhodes was particularly anxious to justify the controversial agreement he had made with the settlers of Stellaland on 8 September 1885. The interpretation of the agreement was significant as it exposed Rhodes to accusations of both anti-imperialism - for having recognised the claims of the very freebooters Warren had been sent to disperse - and of having discarded the rights of Africans in-order to appease the European settlers.

If such accusations had passed without refutation, it would clearly justify the assumption that the British public's first impression of Rhodes was that of a Janus-faced colonial politician, committed to the exclusion of imperial influence in South Africa and indifferent to the fate of Africans. In the event, however, not only did Rhodes present a credible defence of his actions in Bechuanaland, he took the opportunity to elucidate what he considered to be Britain's imperial destiny in Africa, and this was very far from being the ideal of an anti-imperialist.

In his letters to *The Times* Rhodes explained that upon his arrival in Stellaland he had been confronted by a population on the brink of civil war, Mackenzie's actions having divided the country into warring factions. In the northern republic of Goshen he had found the settler allies of one chief attempting to exterminate the peoples of a rival claimant. With the limited support of seventy policeman, Rhodes explained how he had attempted to establish peace in the country,

³⁶ The public debate between Rhodes and Warren took the form of five extensive letters, each under the heading 'Bechuanaland', and published in *The Times* during November and December 1885, two letters by C.J. Rhodes: 11 November 1885, p.8, and 2 December 1885, p.13; and three letters by Sir Charles Warren: 17 November 1885, p.8, 26 November 1885, p.10, and 14 December 1885, p.12.

and preserve for the African chiefs the territory and cattle still in their possession.

Rhodes defended his agreement with the Stellalanders by insisting that Mackenzie's acts constituted the principal impediment to the settler's acceptance of British suzerainty. On this basis he cancelled Mackenzie's proclamations, confirmed existing land titles, provided for a court of arbitration to investigate cattle theft, and granted self-government to Stellaland pending annexation to the Cape Colony. Rhodes further justified his actions by stating that at this time there was no notion of Bechuanaland being made a Crown colony, it being understood that the territory was to remain under British protection pending annexation to the Cape.

Rhodes argued that the settlement of the country had gone too far to be disturbed, and that Mackenzie himself had promised farms to the original settlers - the only difference being that Rhodes did not recognise the advisability of a repurchase of the farms or of monetary compensation. Rhodes insisted that his agreement with the Stellalanders subsequently received the approval of the High Commissioner, the Colonial Secretary, and Warren himself. As to the flag controversy, Rhodes explained that the flag had been removed by an Imperial officer under instruction from the High Commissioner, as precedent dictated that the flag should not fly over a protectorate.

Rhodes insisted that the primary cause of disagreement between the High Commissioner and Warren had been the latter's determination not to carry out the clauses of the agreement he had made with the Stellalanders. Instead Warren had imposed military rule, a system Rhodes described as 'in every respect hateful to a Dutch population', and had arrested their leader on an 'abortive charge'. As to the clause regarding land claims this, Rhodes

explained, had been 'so mutilated and circumscribed as to render it practically inoperative'.³⁷

Rhodes insisted that the High Commissioner had been left with no choice but to repudiate Warren's actions. Justifying Robinson's decision in *The Times* Rhodes explained: 'He saw distrust of England spreading widely throughout the Dutch population, he saw the disintegration of the Imperial party, and he saw Sir C. Warren's policy condemned by a unanimous Cape Parliament.' Rhodes drew the distinction between Warren's impractical designs for the disputed territory and the pragmatic imperialism advocated by Robinson and himself. For Rhodes this was epitomised by Warren's apparent desire to exclude settlers of Dutch extraction from the new protectorate, a policy which contrasted sharply with the former's belief that there could be no stable future for the Empire in South Africa without Dutch co-operation.

Recognising the importance of underlining his own imperialist credentials to his countrymen, Rhodes dedicated significant space in his letter to refuting Warren's charges of anti-imperialism. In regard to his own controversial comments concerning the exclusion of the 'Imperial factor', Rhodes insisted that his words had been quoted 'without any regard for their context or any consideration of the policy of the Home Government'. He argued that the sentiment had been expressed 'under the special circumstances then existing'. This was evidently a reference to the Imperial Government's own preference for the Colony to ultimately assume responsibility for the administration of Bechuanaland. In attempting to persuade the Cape Assembly to undertake this responsibility, Rhodes had used language intended to elicit a favourable response from his listeners, therefore, Rhodes was able to argue that his actions had been

³⁷ Ibid: C.J. Rhodes, 11 November 1885, p.8.

'entirely consistent with the policy which the Imperial Government was endeavouring to carry out'.³⁸

Rhodes then turned his attention to questions of wider imperial significance, in particular his conception of what constituted the most profitable relationship between the colonies and the mother country. '...it should be understood', Rhodes argued, 'that colonial politicians may be as fully alive to the interests of the Empire as Imperial officers'.³⁹ In making this assertion Rhodes insisted that his primary concern was the maintenance of cordial relations between the colonies and the mother country and strengthening the cause of imperial unity. He argued in essence that the brand of imperialism exemplified by Warren and Mackenzie was an outdated construct, and that in the future colonies would need to be held by their affections and not by force. 'The attempt to represent the case as a struggle between Imperial and colonial interests', Rhodes concluded, 'is as inaccurate as it is unwise'.⁴⁰

In his letters to *The Times* Rhodes provided the British people with a first insight into what he considered to be Britain's imperial destiny in Africa. Rhodes explained that his 'keen interest' in Bechuanaland lay in its strategic significance, describing it once again as the 'Suez Canal of the interior', and as the 'link which may join our settlements to the richer districts beyond'.⁴¹ It was the territory lying beyond Bechuanaland's northern border, between the Limpopo and the Zambesi Rivers, which excited Rhodes's interest. He described these territories - Mashonaland and Matabeleland – the territories which would soon bear his name, as mineral rich and suitable for European colonisation. Rhodes then made the mental leap across the Zambesi River and proceeded to describe the great lakes region of the African interior, of new populations ready to

³⁸ Ibid: C.J. Rhodes, 2 December 1885, p.13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid: C.J. Rhodes, 11 November 1885, p.8.

consume British manufactures, and of how these new commercial fields were to be drawn together by railway.⁴²

The annexation of Bechuanaland brought Rhodes to the attention of the British public, almost for the first time. If he had been known before it was as a 'distinguished Cape politician', or as the 'Diamond King' of Kimberley. Bechuanaland did not establish Rhodes as a household name in Britain, however, it did plant a seed of consciousness in the public mind, so that years later, when Rhodes's name became one to conjure with, there was already an existing impression in the minds of many as to the nature of the man and his principles. While Rhodes's public quarrel with Warren and Mackenzie may have garnered him influential enemies in humanitarian circles, and among the advocates of direct imperial rule, there can be little doubt that Rhodes - both personally and through his associates - was afforded ample opportunity to contradict the aspersions of his critics. In this way he was able to demonstrate his patriotism and, at an earlier date than is commonly acknowledged, expound to the British people his vision for the Empire in Africa.

There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Rhodes's appeals did not go unheeded; on the contrary, influential journals in the British press acknowledged the basic similarity between his objectives and those of his metropolitan opponents; they applauded Rhodes's patriotism, and discerned in his schemes an imperial ambition that far exceeded those of his rivals. Suspicions may have persisted as to his sympathies, however, for the observant contemporary there was sufficient evidence to affirm Rhodes's imperialist credentials, and dispel any notion of conflicted loyalties.

The press reaction to the publication of Rhodes's first letter suggests that his attempt to convince his countrymen that far from opposing the 'imperial factor' he had merely offered an alternative

⁴² Ibid.

interpretation, had met with success. On the same day *The Times* informed its readers:

The dispute, lamentable as it is, turns upon differences as to means, not as to ends, and, comparing the statements of Sir Charles Warren and Mr Rhodes, we must conclude that the consentient opinion of the great majority of Colonial politicians is in favour of territorial expansion northwards.⁴³

The *Pall Mall Gazette* echoed these sentiments, highlighting Rhodes's scheme for the extension of the protectorate to the Zambesi River:

If that be so, Mr Rhodes must be as much convinced as Sir Charles Warren...that our duty and our interest alike demand the treatment of the South African question from an Imperial rather than from a purely Cape point of view.⁴⁴

Commenting on the rivalry between the 'colonial' faction of Rhodes and Robinson on the one hand and the 'imperial' faction of Warren and Mackenzie on the other, the *Standard* declared that in their fundamental similarities it was akin to watching 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee' 'shrieking defiance at one another'.⁴⁵

The *Standard* also bears witness to the fact that Rhodes's arguments in favour of local administration and the adoption of a conciliatory attitude towards the Dutch in South Africa won support in Britain. It is also clear that Rhodes's efforts in securing the vital route to the interior did not go unappreciated:

In my judgement Mr Rhodes's action has been founded on thoroughly sound principles, and we may thank him that we still have an open road to the interior. He has earned the gratitude of all who value the future of South Africa as an English country by a firm purpose shown in the teeth of a storm of abuse.⁴⁶

Rhodes's imperial sympathies were duly noted and the British press was gratified to discover a colonial politician whose ambitions

⁴³ *The Times*, 11 November 1885, p.9.

⁴⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 November 1885, p.3.

⁴⁵ *Standard*, 13 March 1885, p.5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

for the Empire matched their own. As *The Times* explained, neither party in the debate could be considered anti-imperial. The scale of Rhodes's ambitions appeared to have placed his commitment to the 'imperial idea' beyond reproach. The journal concluded:

...the ideas of Mr Rhodes are far more ambitious than those of Sir Charles Warren...It will thus be apparent that the policy which has triumphed over Sir Charles Warren's...is not a "backward" policy as compared with a "forward" one. Both...are in favour of extending the British dominions northwards, and the retrogressive school of politicians, which would restrict English interests in South Africa to a naval station at Simon's Bay, finds no representatives in the present controversy.⁴⁷

It would appear, therefore, that when in later years his enemies resurrected the bogey of Rhodes as a 'pro-Boer', as an 'anti-imperialist', or as a man whose sympathies had widely fluctuated, they were engaging in selective memory. Sufficient evidence to the contrary existed and was publicly available. Few contemporaries appear to have struggled to interpret Rhodes's intentions correctly, with the exception of those who had a vested interest in doing so. His allies had always stressed the consistency of Rhodes's ideology, arguing that while the details of his schemes may have altered in response to changing circumstances, the fundamental ambition remained the same; this would appear to be borne out by the public record.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 11 November 1885, p.9.

Chapter 2

Rhodes, Irish Home Rule, and the Pall Mall Gazette

Rhodes's second contribution to British political discourse was no less controversial than the first. Once again it entailed the championing of colonial peoples to administer their own affairs to the apparent exclusion of the 'imperial factor'. His decision to donate £10,000 to the campaign funds of Charles Stewart Parnell and his Irish National Party would haunt Rhodes until the end of his life. At the height of the Boer War J.A. Hobson referenced the donation in his article 'Capitalism and Imperialism in South Africa', still alleging that Rhodes had made the donation in-order to secure the support of the Irish members in the House of Commons for his commercial projects in Africa.¹ Moreover, when *Blackwood's Magazine* considered the criticisms most frequently levelled against Rhodes in the latter's obituary, it seems extraordinary to note that his donation to Parnell was referenced alongside events of such imperial significance as his promotion of the Jameson Raid and his imperious behaviour during the siege of Kimberley as 'black marks' in a controversial career.²

A consideration of how news of Rhodes's donation was received by contemporaries is instructive both in terms of piecing together the early phases of Rhodes's career as an imperial statesman – identifying precisely when the principal elements of the Rhodes cult began to fall into place - but also in questioning to what extent these later accusations were justified. Were Rhodes's intentions really shrouded in mystery? Or, as in the case of Bechuanaland, was a more prosaic explanation readily available?

Rhodes's interest in the issue of Home Rule went back many years. He confided to the journalist-historian, R. Barry O'Brien:

¹ *Contemporary Review*, January 1900, pp.1-17 (p.8).

² *Blackwood's Magazine*, March 1902, pp.422-433.

I always, even when I was at Oxford, believed in the justice and wisdom of letting localities manage their own affairs...Moreover, I was interested in the Home Rule movement because I believed that Irish Home Rule would lead to Imperial Home Rule.³

The opportunity to engage with this issue directly first presented itself to Rhodes in 1887 on the return voyage from London to South Africa. A fellow passenger was the Irish politician John Swift MacNeil, MP for South Donegal and a fund raiser for Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party. The two men established a rapport, finding they shared many mutual friends from Oxford. It was in the course of these conversations that Rhodes offered to donate £10,000 to the Irish Party on the understanding that if Home Rule was granted, Irish members would be retained at Westminster.

Rhodes understood that among the principal challenges facing the Empire in the new century would be the need to reconcile the colonists' desire for self-determination with the imperial need for unity. In common with an increasing number of his countrymen Rhodes envisaged a federated Empire, with each constituent part enjoying perfect autonomy in local affairs, and with broader concerns such as defence and foreign relations determined by an imperial parliament in which each dominion would find representation. It was with such imperial considerations in mind that Rhodes approached the issue of Irish Home Rule, believing that the constitutional precedent set by Ireland would act as a template for all future relations between the dominions and the mother country.

On his return to Ireland in late October, MacNeil arranged to meet with Parnell to discuss Rhodes's proposals. The matter was discussed for a couple of days, after which, MacNeil later recalled: 'Over my own signature, but at Mr Parnell's dictation, I wrote to Mr Rhodes expressing grateful acknowledgements for the offer, which Mr Parnell was prepared to accept on behalf of the Irish

³ O'Brien, R. Barry, *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell, 1846-1891*, Vol. II, Smith, Elder and Co. London 1898, p.185.

Parliamentary Party.⁴ According to Parnell's biographer, R. Barry O'Brien, when Rhodes later met the Irish leader in London he could scarcely have been clearer as to his own expectations of the deal:

I want Imperial Federation. Home Rule with the Irish members in the Imperial Parliament will be the beginning of Imperial Federation. Home Rule with the Irish members excluded from the Imperial Parliament would lead nowhere, so far as my interests, which are Imperial interests, are concerned.⁵

For his part, Parnell is said to have replied: 'I do not feel strongly on the question of the retention or the exclusion of the Irish members, but Mr Gladstone does. The difficulty is not with me, but with him.'⁶ Gladstone had previously insisted upon the necessity of exclusion, principally, to ensure that the proposed Irish Parliament began its life with the undivided loyalty of its members and thus gained respect and authority.⁷

When Parnell asked Rhodes if he required anything else, Rhodes answered in the affirmative, and said that he required the inclusion of a 'little clause' in the next Bill, stating that any colony which made a contribution to Imperial defence, should be entitled to representation at Westminster, in proportion to its contribution to Imperial revenue. This was a key factor in Rhodes's scheme; Ireland would not portend the dissolution of the Empire, but would stand as an example of unity.

For Parnell, the sting in the tail was Rhodes's suggestion that in line with this new policy, Irish representation in the Commons should be reduced. Parnell's hostility was founded on the belief that 'until the Irish legislature obtained full control over such matters as the police, judiciary and land policy', the Irish position would be vulnerable to

⁴ MacNeil, John. G. Swift, *What I Have Seen and Heard*, Arrowsmith, London 1925, p.265.

⁵ O'Brien, Vol. II, p.186.

⁶ Ibid: p.186.

⁷ Adelman, Paul., *Great Britain and the Irish Question, 1800-1922*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1996, p.99.

attack.⁸ 'It is only by our strength that we can make ourselves felt there', Parnell complained, 'and if you were to cut us down to fifty or forty or thirty-five they would pay no attention to us.'⁹ Rhodes appears not to have pressed this point but to have agreed with Parnell on the most significant issue, namely the retention of Irish members at Westminster.

The two men parted on the understanding that Rhodes would send Parnell a letter outlining his views, and that in reply, the Irish leader would identify the areas where scope existed for further co-operation. In the subsequent correspondence Rhodes confirmed his gift of £10,000 to the Irish Party, in addition to the sum of £1000 he had been authorised to offer in the name of a Mr John Morrrough, an Irish resident of Kimberley.

Rhodes and Parnell exchanged letters in the June of 1888, and their publication a month later brought the transaction to national attention. While it is difficult to accurately quantify the number of words expended on this issue by the British press, it is clear that the infamy which would later attract itself to this agreement was by no means reflected in its initial coverage. This is perhaps unsurprising. MacNeil himself admitted to never having heard of Rhodes at the time of their meeting, while *The Times*, in spite of his adventures in Bechuanaland, described Rhodes somewhat modestly as 'a gentleman engaged in mining speculations and politics in South Africa...'¹⁰

The letters themselves received wide circulation; however, in terms of editorial comment they appear to have received at best uneven coverage. It would also appear that the transaction occasioned little comment in Parliament. The young Unionist MP Elliott Lees was the only member to specifically mention Rhodes's

⁸ Taylor, G.P., 'Cecil Rhodes and the Second Home Rule Bill', *Historical Journal*, December 1971, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.771-781 (p.775).

⁹ O'Brien, Vol. II, p.186.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 9 July 1888, p.9.

gift, doing so in relation to the Piggott forgeries.¹¹ Lees questioned why if Parnell was innocent had he not sued *The Times* for libel? In comparison with the 'enormous damages' he was liable to receive, the gift 'by a Mr Rhodes' would have seemed a mere 'fleabite'.¹² It is perhaps telling that this section of Lees's speech was condensed in *The Times*, and the apparently insignificant allusion to Rhodes omitted entirely.

Of the national daily newspapers the *Pall Mall Gazette* was unusual in dedicating considerable space to a discussion of the ideas and the characters featured in the correspondence. The *Gazette's* disproportionate coverage can almost certainly be attributed to the disposition of its maverick editor William Thomas Stead, who was himself both a Home Ruler and a committed imperialist.

The Rhodes-Parnell correspondences on the subject of Irish Home Rule were published in the British Press on 9 July 1888. In this connection Rhodes was typically described as a member of the Cape Assembly, an ex-cabinet minister, and as a shareholder in the De Beers Diamond Mining Company of South Africa. In his first letter of 19 June 1888 Rhodes explained: '...my interest in the Irish question has been heightened by the fact that in it I see the possibility of the commencement of changes which will eventually mould and weld together all parts of the British Empire'. Rhodes maintained that the constitutional apparatus of Great Britain was outmoded, with 'Imperial matters hav[ing] to stand their chance of a hearing alongside of railway and tram Bills'. Home Rule for Ireland, he explained, would be an important first step in rationalising the British

¹¹ The Piggott forgeries were a series of letters published by *The Times* newspaper in the spring of 1887 which appeared to demonstrate Parnell's support for radical nationalist movements, including most infamously his apparent condonation of the 'Phoenix Park Murders' of 1882. The letters, allegedly written by Parnell himself, were in fact the work of an Irish journalist, Richard Piggott. At the Select Committee instituted to investigate the charges Parnell was vindicated after Piggott confessed the forgery.

¹² HC Deb 24 July 1888, Vol. 329 cc336-427.

political system, by removing 'trivial and local affairs' to 'district councils or local bodies'.¹³

The desire to improve the efficiency of the Westminster Parliament was only half of Rhodes's plan; 'side by side with this tendency of decentralisation of local affairs', he explained, 'there is growing up a feeling for the necessity of greater union in imperial matters'. Rhodes identified the 'primary tie' between the mother country and her colonies as that of 'self-defence'. Colonies were already beginning to make contributions for this purpose; however, if this was to become a permanent arrangement, Rhodes argued that the colonies would require representation in an 'Imperial Parliament'. Rhodes was again unequivocal as to his intentions: 'You will, perhaps, say that I am making the Irish question a stalking-horse for a scheme of Imperial Federation; but if so I am at least placing Ireland in the forefront of the battle.'¹⁴

In reply, Parnell confirmed his willingness to seek the retention of Irish members at Westminster: 'My own feeling on the matter is that if Mr Gladstone includes in his next Home Rule measure provisions for such retention, we should cheerfully concur in them and accept them with good will and good faith, with the intention of taking our share in the Imperial partnership.'¹⁵ In his letter of 28 June, Rhodes thanked the Irish leader for his sentiments, before reaffirming his belief that the policy upon which they had agreed, if brought to fruition, would lead to 'a closer union of the Empire – making it an Empire in reality and not in name only'. With this statement Rhodes confirmed his gift of £10,000 to the Irish Party.¹⁶

For the *Pall Mall Gazette* the agreement was especially significant. '...almost alone among the leading advocates of Home Rule', the journal had pleaded at the last reading of the Bill for Irish

¹³ C.J. Rhodes letter to C. S. Parnell, 19 June 1888, published in *The Times*, 9 July 1888, p.7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ C.S. Parnell letter to C.J. Rhodes, 23 June 1888, published in *The Times*, 9 July 1888, p.7.

¹⁶ C.J. Rhodes letter to C.S. Parnell, 28 June 1888, 9 July 1888, p.7.

members to be retained at Westminster, believing that their exclusion was 'not only a defect but a fatal defect, and that unless it was abandoned the Bill was lost'. Unfortunately, the *Gazette* lamented, at that 'fatal moment' in 1886, the British Prime Minister William Gladstone had acted under the counsels of John Morley, a minister renowned for his 'utter lack of sympathy with the federation of the Empire'. For this error of judgement the journal blamed 'the disaster' of the 1886 Bill and a General election lost to the Conservative Unionists 'on a false and misleading issue'.¹⁷

It is perhaps unsurprising that Rhodes and the *Gazette's* editor, W.T. Stead, should have been so ideologically compatible. When Rhodes made Stead's acquaintance the following year, he informed the controversial editor that his own ideas had been profoundly modified and moulded by the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁸ As Liberal imperialists both men sympathised with the principle of self-determination and yet both were equally committed to the maintenance of the imperial connection. Rhodes would no doubt have shared the *Gazette's* assessment that 'Justice rather than Coercion is the cement of Empire'.¹⁹

The *Pall Mall Gazette* subsequently published an interview with Parnell, in the course of which he provided one of the first potted biographies of Rhodes to appear in the British press. He corrected the misconception emanating from certain quarters that Rhodes was an Irishman, and far from suggesting that the support of his new benefactor stemmed from some detached ideological commitment to Home Rule, insisted that Rhodes's interest derived from a fervent belief in the British Empire and the desire to safeguard imperial unity:

He is the chief proprietor of the great diamond mine at Kimberley, an enthusiastic Imperialist, and full of the new hope that Home Rule has created in the mind of the colonists...Mr

¹⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1888, p.1.

¹⁸ Stead, William Thomas, *The Last Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes*, Review of Reviews Office, London 1902, pp.79-80.

¹⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1888, p.1.

Rhodes, who is an Imperialist before everything, hailed with great satisfaction the prospect that Home Rule would open the door to the federation of the Empire.²⁰

In the days that followed the *Pall Mall Gazette* would credit Rhodes with having taken the first practical step towards the reconciliation of Home Rule and Imperial Federation. Perhaps for the first time in Britain Rhodes was credited with having applied a practical solution to a long-standing ideological dilemma. Desirous of learning more about this comparatively unknown South African, the *Gazette* sought 'particulars as to his antecedents and character'.²¹

To satisfy this sudden interest in Rhodes, which indications suggest existed largely in the mind of the journal's editor, the *Gazette* sought out Swift MacNeil - the go-between in the negotiations - to offer an impression of his 'South African acquaintance'. MacNeil's comments are particularly interesting as we begin to see the genesis of personality traits which would form vital components of the Rhodes legend.

In accordance with the *Gazette*'s own enthusiasm MacNeil described Rhodes somewhat melodramatically as 'the hero of the hour', attributing a significance to the agreement which its insubstantial assurances scarcely merited.²² MacNeil was on safer ground when he described Rhodes as 'a notable man, whose career interests the Empire'. Like Parnell, MacNeil provided the biographical details that were to become so familiar in the years ahead – the sickly young man who travelled to South Africa to recover his health, and who made a fortune in diamonds and gold, before turning his attention to politics and imperial expansion.

Interestingly, MacNeil suggests that Rhodes's name was first brought to the attention of the British people, not in association with the Home Ruler Parnell, but with the great imperial martyr Major-

²⁰ Ibid: 10 July 1888, pp.1-2.

²¹ Ibid: 12 July 1888, pp.1-2.

²² Ibid.

General Charles Gordon. This relationship, MacNeil explained, had culminated with the latter inviting Rhodes to Khartoum to be his private secretary. Having recently accepted the role of Treasurer-General at the Cape in Sir Thomas Scanlan's Government, Rhodes was unable to accept. It was then that MacNeil relayed Rhodes's famous refrain on hearing the news of Gordon's death: 'Ah, if I had only been there, I believe I could have saved him; and, whether or not, I am sorry I was not with him.'²³ In this way Rhodes was not only identified with the martyred Gordon, but with the sentiment of having wished, if need be, to die at his side. It was with such expressions that the Rhodes legend began to take shape.

MacNeil contributed another piece to the myth when he revealed, perhaps for the first time in the public domain, Rhodes's customary frugality. When the interviewer asked what Rhodes intended to do with his money, MacNeil answered piously: 'He wishes to use his money for the consolidation of the Empire and the benefit of humanity.' In hinting at Rhodes's ambitions for the Empire MacNeil concluded: 'His great idea is the Empire, and the holding together of the Empire by an offensive and defensive alliance between all the English-speaking communities.'²⁴

Among the few politicians to publicly comment on the donation in the national press was the Liberal MP Octavius Morgan. Morgan's perception of the agreement underlines the sense of apprehension which pervaded much of the national discourse concerning the durability of the British Empire. J.R. Seeley's highly influential work, *The Expansion of England* had been published earlier in the decade, and had drawn the attention of Britons as never before to the fragility of their global status.²⁵ There was an increasing awareness that only by binding the Empire together could Britain secure its future as a world power. As Morgan told the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Seeley, John Robert, *The Expansion of England*, MacMillan and Co., London 1883.

Being an ardent believer in Imperial Federation, the correspondence published on Monday between Mr Parnell and Mr Cecil Rhodes has given me much delight and satisfaction...Most travelled subjects of the Queen are of opinion that unless the United Kingdom, the colonies, and dependencies are brought into closer relation, a time may come when this great Empire will break to pieces, while if united their power would be simply irresistible.²⁶

The concept of Imperial federation was increasingly advanced in the second half of the nineteenth century to meet the challenge of increased global competition, and the advance of mass democracy. Among the most notable contributors to the debate was Sir Frederick Young, Vice-President of the Royal Colonial Institute and himself the author of an early work on imperial federation.²⁷ Continuing in its efforts to afford the Rhodes-Parnell solution maximum exposure, the *Pall Mall Gazette* appealed to Young, a man the journal described as 'one of the fathers of Imperial Federation', to submit his views on the correspondence.

Young's stance on Home Rule epitomised its complexities as a political issue. Despite an ideological commitment to Home Rule, Young had voted against the last Bill, precisely because he believed that in its original form it tended towards the 'disintegration of the Empire'. When questioned as to whether he concurred with the sentiments expressed by Rhodes, Young answered in the affirmative, reminding the interviewer that he had been advocating the same position for the past twelve years. Young's response is indicative of the fact that Rhodes's ideas were by no means innovative in an ideological sense; rather, in a manner which was to become characteristic of the man, he was recognised for having applied a practical solution to what had seemed an interminable theoretical dilemma.

²⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 July 1888, p.2.

²⁷ Young, Sir Frederick, *Imperial Federation of Great Britain and Her Colonies*, S.W. Silver and Co., London 1876.

It does not appear that Rhodes was personally subjected to any widespread vilification for the donation - beyond elements of the Unionist press making the conventional observation that Rhodes had wasted his money and that Parnell could be neither controlled nor trusted. *The Times*, for example, noted: 'Mr Rhodes apparently has never heard of Mr Parnell's celebrated statement that he could not set a limit to the aspirations of a nation' – the inference being that Rhodes had invested his hopes in an unreliable ally.²⁸ The Conservative *Sheffield Telegraph* was more frank in its assessment: 'This much, however, Mr Rhodes may take as certain, that his ten thousand pounds is as effectually wasted as if he had flung it sovereign by sovereign into the sea when he was voyaging from Cape Town to England.'²⁹

The fact that a relatively unknown member of the Cape Assembly, with interests in South African mining speculations, had resolved to make a large donation to the Irish Party scarcely warranted unremitting press coverage. It must also be borne in mind that the whole affair was overshadowed by the continuing fallout from the Pigott forgeries scandal and the onset of what became known as the 'Parnell Commission'. Indeed, on 9 July 1888, the day his correspondence with Rhodes was published, Parnell asked the government to institute a Select Committee of the House to inquire into the charges against him. Within this context the donation of a Cape politician to the Irish Party was a mere side-show.

The meaning of the Rhodes-Parnell letters scarcely required further editorialising - perhaps offering an indication as to why comparatively few national journals elected to provide one. Rhodes's position was unequivocal, and however misguided contemporary commentators may have considered his decision to trust Parnell, evidence to suggest that his donation was considered anti-imperial in nature is scarce. On the contrary, both Parnell and their intermediary

²⁸ *The Times*, 9 July 1888, p.9.

²⁹ *Sheffield Telegraph*, quoted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 July 1888, p.11.

MacNeil were explicit in explaining the nature of Rhodes's interest in the issue of Home Rule. Rhodes's proposals met with the approval of men closely associated with the concept of imperial federation, including the Vice-President of the Royal Colonial Institute who was himself considered to be a 'father' of the movement. As the *Glasgow Herald* acknowledged: 'There is no mistake whatever about Mr Rhodes's views. He aims at consolidating, not at disintegrating, the Empire, and he thinks that such consolidation can best be effected by placing Ireland in the forefront of the Imperialist movement.'³⁰

As in the case of Bechuanaland, we find that the public sources support the testimonies of Rhodes's friends and associates that his ideology remained remarkably consistent from the moment he entered upon the British political stage, details changing with circumstances, but fundamentally espousing the same creed. It also reinforces the view that later critics were chiefly responsible for projecting these negative associations back through time.

It would appear that both in the case of Bechuanaland and in his donation to Parnell, Rhodes was judged to be guilty by association. It was not that his own sentiments were vague or betrayed suspect sympathies, nor did it stem from the misunderstanding of contemporaries, rather – to the extent that this occurred - his name became associated in the public mind with controversies. In Bechuanaland there was the residual memory that he had opposed Warren, a man who had come to symbolise the imperial forward policy after years of vacillation. He had opposed Mackenzie, the renowned missionary and advocate of humanitarian imperialism; and finally, he had offered his support to Parnell – perhaps the most controversial contemporary political figure.

If the British people knew little about Rhodes in the summer of 1888, the same could not be said of Parnell. While at pains to present himself as a moderate Home Ruler to the British electorate,

³⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 9 July 1888, p.6.

his association with the Fenians, American-militants, and others groups committed to armed revolution, raised doubts as to his commitment to the constitutional process. The British press had long drawn attention to these associations, most notably in the spring of 1887 when *The Times* ran a series of articles entitled 'Parnellism and Crime.' This campaign infamously culminated with the publication of a letter, allegedly written by Parnell, in which he appeared to condone the so-called 'Phoenix Park Murders' of 1882.³¹ Though the letters were ultimately revealed to be forgeries, the negative press and the searching committee of inquiry that followed exposed the violent aspects of the Home Rule movement. Parnell's reputation was further besmirched when he was named as co-respondent in the divorce of Captain William O'Shea and his wife Katharine. The ensuing public scandal split the Irish Party; Parnell was ultimately deposed as its leader and died in 1891.

It was unfortunate for Rhodes that at this formative moment, as his own character was being forged in the public mind, that this should have coincided with the decline of Parnell's own reputation – the man with whom Rhodes was chiefly associated. As we have seen Rhodes's own pronouncements on the donation, if considered justly, were unequivocal, as were those of respected proponents of imperial federation. The negativity which would manifest itself later did so primarily by virtue of association. When one considers the similarities of the two men, it becomes clear how the reputation of one became synonymous with the other.

Like Parnell, Rhodes was tasked with the conciliation of disparate and at times opposing factions, in-order that he might achieve specific objectives. This necessity of having to appear to be all things to all men inevitably exposed both Rhodes and Parnell to accusations of duplicity. Parnell, as an Irish Protestant landowner,

³¹ On 6 May 1882 Lord Frederick Cavendish, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Thomas Henry Burke, the Permanent Under Secretary, were assassinated in Phoenix Park, Dublin by members of the Irish National Invincibles, a radical splinter group of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

and Rhodes as an Englishmen renowned for his Afrikaner sympathies, were always likely to be arraigned as traitors and conspirators by those who failed to appreciate the peculiar conditions under which they worked. Both men recognised the political reality, accepting that this often differed from their own ideological inclinations, and were willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

Notwithstanding his nationalist sympathies, Parnell's associates often considered him to be a 'Tory at heart'. As Paul Bew explains: 'The Irish ancient regime, he felt, could not survive the combination of the economic crisis of the 1870s and the democratization of the 1880s without drastic change.' Working within this framework Parnell 'saw it as his role to bring about that change on the most conservative basis available'.³² Comparisons can be drawn with Rhodes's position in South Africa. Cognizant of the demographic reality, and sceptical as to both Britain's capacity and willingness to administer distant territories, Rhodes felt compelled to pursue his imperial ambitions within a colonial framework, to the apparent exclusion of the 'imperial factor'.

Both men also found themselves at the centre of very public scandals, and the subjects of high profile inquiries. Unsurprisingly, it was to the Parnell Commission that the British press repeatedly turned as a contemporary precedent in its comparisons and appraisals of the Select Committee on British South Africa.³³ It is hardly surprising therefore that Rhodes's association with Parnell should have produced an assimilatory effect in the public mind, while affording his opponents the opportunity to perpetuate negative assumptions concerning his loyalties which have limited basis in fact.

³² Bew, Paul, 'Charles Stewart Parnell', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

³³ The Select Committee on British South Africa was a House of Commons Select Committee inaugurated to inquire into the Jameson Raid of 1895 – an armed incursion masterminded by Rhodes for the purpose of overthrowing the Government of the South African Republic.

Chapter 3

'Painting the African Map Red:'

The Acquisition of the Charter and the Founding of the British South Africa Company

On 2 June 1877, while still an undergraduate at Oxford, the twenty four year old Rhodes had committed to paper his observations of the world and the role he intended to play in it. This document, known to history as Rhodes's 'Confession of Faith', represented in the words of one biographer his 'most detailed statement of philosophy and belief'.¹ Rhodes had concluded that his objective would be to render himself useful to his country, asserting:

I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. I contend that every acre added to our territory means the birth of more of the English race who otherwise would not be brought into existence. Added to this, the absorption of the greater portion of the world under our rule simply means the end of all wars.²

To this end Rhodes vowed that he would dedicate his life to the furtherance of the British Empire and to the unity of the Anglo-Saxon race.³ It was with this ambition in mind that Rhodes turned his attention to the conquest of the African interior, and before all, to the allegedly mineral rich lands of Zambesia.

In the years following the annexation of Bechuanaland Rhodes had consolidated his financial empire. In 1888 he had succeeded in amalgamating the diamond mines at Kimberley, and with his partners had formed De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. Rhodes was barely exaggerating when, on 31 March of that year he informed a meeting of the Company's shareholders, that the new enterprise represented

¹ Rotberg, p.99.

² Stead, William Thomas (ed.), *The Last Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes*, pp.58-60.

³ Ibid.

'the richest, the greatest and the most powerful company the world has ever seen'.⁴ At its height De Beers would hold a virtual monopoly over the world's diamond industry.

The previous year Rhodes had established the Gold Fields of South Africa Company to represent his interests in the Transvaal, where he had made a second fortune in gold. It has been estimated that at this time Rhodes was realising between £300,000 and £400,000 per annum from his interests on the Rand, in addition to the £200,000 he was receiving from De Beers.⁵

Newly endowed with the financial resources to realise his imperial ambitions, Rhodes turned to the model of the chartered company, which had pioneered British rule elsewhere, notably in India and North America. The acquisition of South-Central Africa would begin as a commercial proposition. Rhodes's intention was to acquire a mineral concession from the paramount chief of the Zambezi tribes which would in-turn form the basis of a Royal Charter. This charter would endow Rhodes's Company – duly formed for the purpose - with the licence to exploit and settle Zambesia under the aegis of Great Britain.

II

The territorial value of Zambesia had been the subject of conjecture for 300 years. Portuguese missionaries and explorers became the first Europeans to render favourable accounts of the territory in the 16th century, describing the existence of sophisticated stone structures, and speculating that this was in fact the biblical land of

⁴ Lockhart and Woodhouse, p.128.

⁵ Ibid.

Ophir, famed for its associations with King Solomon's Mines, and the Queen of Sheba's riches.⁶

The discoveries of European explorers in the mid-nineteenth century prompted a resurgence of interest in Zambesia, both commercially and as a field for European emigration. Dr David Livingstone's discovery of Lake Ngami in 1849 controverted the prevailing wisdom that much of central Africa consisted of 'sandy deserts, into which rivers ran and were lost'.⁷

Livingstone's subsequent expedition to the Zambesi in 1865 demonstrated the region's agricultural potential, the quality of its soil being 'amply proved by its productions', including indigo, cotton, tobacco and sugar cane.⁸ The discovery of fertile lands and navigable rivers succeeded in transforming European assessments of Africa almost overnight.

Favourable accounts of the region's mineral wealth were rendered by the German explorer Karl Mauch, whose reports were published under the sanction of scientific societies in England and Germany. On the strength of these reports Thomas Baines acquired a mineral concession in 1870 on behalf of the 'South African Goldfields Company', and in 1872 a second concession was acquired by Sir John Swinburne's 'London and Limpopo Mining Company'.⁹ The concession Rhodes would secure in 1888 would ultimately supersede all of these prior agreements, with the exception of a concession over the Tati district which would be exempted.

Thomas Baines's account of the gold bearing prospects of the region was published posthumously in 1877 and did much to popularise the region's reputation as the golden land of 'Ophir'. It

⁶ Chennells, Anthony John, 'Settler Myths and the Southern Rhodesian Novel', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Zimbabwe 1982, p.6.

⁷ Ibid: p.5.

⁸ Livingstone, David and Charles, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries*, John Murray, London 1865, pp.585-591.

⁹ Mathers, Edward Peter, *Zambesia*, King, Sell and Railton, London 1895, pp.263-269.

also exposed a wider readership to Mauch's original reports, which Baines admitted had been 'highly tinted by the rainbow hues of hope'. In acknowledging the remarkable influence exerted by Mauch's letters, Baines conceded that 'a more sober and realistic statement might have failed to elicit more than a theoretic and impractical assent to facts already known...'¹⁰

The mineral wealth of Zambesia was initially overshadowed, first by the diamonds of Kimberley, and later by the gold of the Rand. Rhodes himself may have identified the northern interior as a natural outlet for Cape and British expansion as early as the 1870's, however, it would appear that only after the Transvaal's covetous intentions became clear, and in light of Germany's appearance on the African stage, was Rhodes's vision for the north brought into sharper focus.¹¹ It must also be acknowledged that only after the amalgamation of the diamond mines and the formation of 'Gold Fields' did Rhodes possess the means to realise his northern ambitions.

As in Bechuanaland, the Transvaal Boers were the first to seize the initiative, despatching an emissary, Piet J. Grobler, to renew a friendship treaty with the Ndebele King, Lobengula. Alive to the threat posed by the Transvaal, Rhodes wasted little time in alerting his powerful allies in the worlds of business and politics to the threat posed by the Republic.

Rhodes numbered among his allies Sir Hercules Robinson, High Commissioner of South Africa, Sir Sidney Shippard, deputy commissioner of Bechuanaland, and Shippard's assistant commissioner, John Smith Moffat, son of the missionary Robert Moffat, and brother-in-law of the missionary-explorer David Livingstone. While Robinson recommended Rhodes's chartered scheme to his superiors at the Colonial Office, Shippard despatched

¹⁰ Ibid: p.120.

¹¹ Rotberg pp.243-244; also Galbraith, John S., *Crown and Charter*, University of California Press 1974, pp.40-41.

Moffat to Matabeleland where he was to secure an agreement with the Ndebele King not to enter into any further agreements with foreign Powers without the consent of the Imperial Government. The Moffat Treaty effectively secured for Britain an option on Lobengula's territory, and bought Rhodes valuable time in which to implement his plans.

On 15 August 1888 Rhodes despatched a three-man delegation to the Ndebele capital Bulawayo. Their task was to acquire a concession from Lobengula granting Rhodes exclusive mineral rights in the King's territories. In practice this included Matabeleland itself and the neighbouring province of Mashonaland, over whose subjects – the Shona – Lobengula claimed hegemony. While by no means the only concession hunters at Lobengula's kraal, the Rhodes party held the advantage of formidable wealth and powerful allies.

At this crucial stage Shippard visited Bulawayo in his official capacity as deputy commissioner of Bechuanaland. While the concession hunters awaited the King's pleasure, Shippard frightened Lobengula with the prospect of land-hungry Boers overrunning his kingdom. It appears that he also assured Lobengula that Rhodes's party represented a group with substantial resources, solid backing, and the support of the Queen.¹²

If official support endowed Rhodes's delegation with an air of legitimacy, the price they were willing to pay for the concession offered the Ndebele King an eminently practical solution to his present security concerns. Rhodes's offer of rifles, ammunition, and a gunboat on the Zambezi would fit the bill.

To the chagrin of the old Bulawayo hands who had been in at the beginning, and the syndicates representing powerful men in London, Rhodes's party was granted the concession. This document, which became known as the Rudd Concession, was the document upon

¹² Rotberg, p.260.

which the Royal Charter, and subsequently the British South Africa Company would be based. How much of the concession Lobengula understood remains subject to conjecture.

The empty handed concession hunters at Bulawayo lost little time in persuading the King that he had effectively signed away his country. This opposition was led by Edward Maund, the agent of the Bechuanaland Exploration Company. Persuaded that he had been hoodwinked Lobengula ordered two of his Indunas to accompany Maund to England to seek the advice of the Queen.

Unbeknownst to Lobengula negotiations had already commenced between Rhodes and Maund's superiors in London - the Colonial Office having expressed the wish that the rival claimants combine their interests. This was duly affected, and on 16 May 1889 Rhodes's scheme received the Colonial Office's seal of approval.

In recommending the expediency of Rhodes's chartered company to his colleagues at the Foreign Office, John Bramston, writing on behalf of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Knutsford, explained that the advantage of a Chartered Company lay in its subordination to the Imperial Government. An autonomous joint-stock company in contrast would be beyond control, and liable to embroil Britain in quarrels with local powers. Bramston also noted that the recently established Imperial East Africa Company had demonstrated how a chartered company could 'to some considerable extent, relieve Her Majesty's Government from diplomatic difficulties and Heavy expenditure'.¹³

By the end of May 1889 the Foreign Office had given its tacit approval to Rhodes's scheme;¹⁴ the last of his major rivals for the concession had been squared, and the united partners were in a position to begin drafting a suitable charter for the Government's

¹³ CO 879/30/372, no. 76, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 16 May 1889.

¹⁴ Ibid. no. 83, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 27 May 1889.

consideration.¹⁵ Having considered the Colonial Secretary's recommendations the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, had reached a similar conclusion. In the words of his most recent biographer, Andrew Roberts, Salisbury 'saw the Chartered Company as an ideal way of fighting a proxy territorial battle against the Portuguese, Germans, Boers and Belgians without incurring any direct responsibility or expense'.¹⁶ At the beginning of July Rhodes and his associates were informed of the Prime Minister's decision to advise her Majesty's Government to grant a Royal charter to the newly established British South Africa (Chartered) Company.¹⁷

III

The decision to grant the charter was taken unilaterally by the British cabinet. Parliamentarians were particularly exercised by the degree of secrecy surrounding the negotiations. Speaking in the House of Commons the Liberal MP Sir John Swinburne characterised the transaction as a 'hole-and-corner affair', declaring that MPs had been refused copies of the proposed charter upon supplication, and that even the First Lord of the Treasury, whom he had questioned the previous day on the issue, had pleaded ignorance:

If this is such a splendid thing as it is said to be, why did not Her Majesty's Government give notice of it, and allow us to discuss it in Committee of the whole House upon the vote for South Africa? Why do they want to grant this charter at a time when nobody is in London and when Parliament is not sitting?¹⁸

Swinburne complained that the only notification the public had received on the subject had been conveyed in the form of a brief announcement in the *London Gazette*.¹⁹ The proclamation -

¹⁵ Ibid, no. 96, The Exploring Company to Colonial Office, 19 June 1889.

¹⁶ Roberts, Andrew, *Salisbury*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1999, p.534.

¹⁷ CO 879/30/372, no 107, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 5 July 1889; also no. 109, Colonial Office to the Exploring Company, 10 July 1889.

¹⁸ HC Deb 26 August 1889 Vol. 340 cc562-70.

¹⁹ *London Gazette*, 26 July 1889, p.4011.

amounting to scarcely a dozen lines - requested that all petitions for and against the proposed company be forwarded to the Privy Council Office on or before 23 August 1889.

In response to this apparent skulduggery Swinburne moved to block the second reading of the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation Bill), declaring that the House would be unwilling to pass the Bill, and so place Ministers beyond the control of Parliament unless the decision to grant the charter was deferred. In seconding the amendment his fellow Liberal Sir George Campbell thanked Swinburne for his intervention, confessing that 'No one would have had the least idea of what was going on...' had the latter not been personally interested in the subject (Swinburne himself claimed concession rights in Lobengula's country).

The original Bill was ultimately passed 70 votes to 20.²⁰ In defence of the Government's handling of the affair, The Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Henry de Worms, insisted somewhat cryptically that it had been 'most important on public grounds' that the charter should be granted without delay and that the decision could not be held over to the next session.²¹

The British press was similarly oblivious to the negotiations being conducted behind closed doors. The first reports pertaining directly to Rhodes's Chartered Company appear to have been published on 29 May 1889, notably in *The Times* under the headline 'British Interests on the Zambesi.'²² Extracts from this article were subsequently republished elsewhere, including that evening's *Pall Mall Gazette*.²³ The rumours in the press coincided with the Foreign Office's decision to grant the charter, demonstrating that the British public were only alerted to the existence of the proposed company after it had become an accomplished fact.

²⁰ HC Deb 26 August 1889 Vol. 340 cc562-70.

²¹ Ibid: Vol. 340 cc.485-7.

²² *The Times*, 29 May 1889, p.6.

²³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 May 1889, p.1., p.6.

The decision to restrict debate concerning important matters of state, whether between MPs or the wider public, was characteristic both of the age in general and of the incumbent Prime Minister Lord Salisbury in particular. This sense of mistrust had been exacerbated by the recently enlarged electorate, however, it extended to all classes and even to the average Parliamentarian, whose grasp of imperial and foreign affairs was considered to be particularly narrow. The stakes were high - with Britain's pre-eminence in the world threatened as never before - this was considered no time to entrust imperial policy to enthusiastic amateurs.²⁴

A further point of controversy concerned the intercession of Robinson and his officials which had not gone unnoticed in London. In Parliament the Liberal MP Charles Bradlaugh drew attention to Shippard's presence at Lobengula's kraal on the day the concession was signed. This assertion was denied by the Under Secretary for the Colonies who assured the House that Shippard was in fact a hundred miles away, that he had no knowledge of the negotiations, and that his assistant John Moffat was likewise absent.²⁵

Robinson's own involvement was queried by the Conservative MP Arthur Baumann. 'It is a singular circumstance', Baumann declared, 'that Mr Rhodes...a short time ago appeared at a meeting of the De Beers Mining Company holding the proxy of Sir Hercules Robinson...' before concluding, 'I will not dwell upon the influence brought to bear upon the High Commissioner at the Cape.' Bradlaugh, standing to support Baumann, insisted he had proof that Rhodes had acted as Robinson's proxy, declaring that when 'influence is being used to put mining lands in the hands of speculators, we have a right to ask, what is the attitude of the Government on the matter?' The Colonial

²⁴ Porter, A.N. *The Origins of the South African War*, Manchester University Press 1980, pp.1-26.

²⁵ HC Deb 25 February 1889, Vol. 333, cc254-6.

Under-Secretary, in defence of Robinson, read a letter drafted by the High Commissioner himself rebuking all charges of nepotism.²⁶

The manner in which the principals of the Chartered Company were introduced to the British public serves as a further indication of Rhodes's comparative insignificance in imperial affairs. We find that the name most publicly associated with the new Chartered Company was not that of Rhodes, but those of the Dukes of Abercorn and Fife – the men Rhodes had persuaded to stand as the Company's 'ornamental directors'.

References to the Chartered Company in the press frequently inferred that their Graces were the prime movers behind the enterprise. What amounted to the official announcement of the new Company in the *London Gazette* referred to its leading protagonists as being 'the Most Noble the Duke of Abercorn, the Right Honourable the Earl of Fife (imminently to be raised to a Dukedom), and others...'²⁷ In Parliament the Radical MP Henry Labouchere - the man destined to become the Chartered Company's most persistent critic in Britain - rhetorically asked who were the principal figures of the Company, before offering the names of their Graces. It took the Conservative MP Arthur Baumann to remind Labouchere that Rhodes was in fact the Company's 'master spirit', as he assumed the member for Northampton must have been 'well aware'.²⁸

Rhodes was almost certainly correct in his assumption that the presence of the peers - one Liberal and one Conservative - would lend dignity to the Company's board and render his proposals the more attractive to both the Government and to the investing public. A consideration of contemporary opinions, however, would suggest that among members of the Radical Opposition - and one Radical in particular - the inclusion of the peers had done little to assuage their opposition and may, in fact, have heightened it. The *Speaker* went so

²⁶ HC Deb 18 March 1889, Vol. 334, cc104-22.

²⁷ *London Gazette*, 26 July 1889, p.4011.

²⁸ HC Deb 13 February 1890, Vol. 341, cc211-94.

far as to describe Abercorn and Fife as ‘two men who were more certain than any other two human beings alive to draw the fire of the Radical party’. The Duke of Fife had drawn their ire by becoming the latest Royal grantee, receiving an estimated £3,000 per annum for having married the Queen’s granddaughter Princess Louise, while the Duke of Abercorn had been the largest recipient of the public bounty under the Ashbourne Act.²⁹

Labouchere would likely have opposed the Chartered Company on ideological grounds alone; however, contemporaries recognised that in the first instance his opposition was predicated on the presence of the peers ‘guinea-pigging’, as he would later term it, on the Company’s Board.³⁰ Labouchere referenced both the grant to Fife and the benefit Abercorn had derived from the Ashbourne Act in his criticism of the charter in the House, to the exclusion of any reference to Rhodes himself.³¹ Having alluded to Labouchere’s earlier opposition to the peers, the *Speaker* prophetically concluded:

...there can be little doubt that unless Mr Labouchere and his British following in the next Parliament are satisfied that all is square and above-board, as is no doubt possible, the next Cabinet will be continuously pressed to revoke the charter.³²

IV

It is clear from the enthusiastic public response that the myths surrounding the alleged wealth of Zambesia had to a significant extent achieved their objectives. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, palpably relieved that British interests in the African interior would be secured,

²⁹ The Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1885 (48 and 49 Vict. c.73) commonly known as the Ashbourne Act (after Edward Gibson, 1st Baron Ashbourne) established a £5million fund enabling any tenant who wished to purchase land to do so. Loans could be taken from the Government and paid back in monthly instalments. The *Speaker* estimated that the Duke of Abercorn had received £267,000 for his property. Not content with this accumulation of wealth, the journal explained, the Cabinet had resolved to add the round sum of £4,000,000 sterling to his pile ‘by the *hocus pocus* of granting a charter’. See the *Speaker*, 21 June 1890, pp.674-675.

³⁰ *Truth*, 16 January 1896, p.143.

³¹ HC Deb 13 February 1890, Vol. 341, cc211-94.

³² *Speaker*, 21 June 1890, pp.674-675.

heralded the chartered plan as 'one of the greatest schemes which have ever startled the somewhat sluggish imagination of John Bull'. The *Gazette* declared that, in addition to Matabeleland, the new territory would include the land of 'Ophir', which was described as lying 'close' to Lobengula's kraal, and as a land 'rich beyond imagination'. Mashonaland, the journal predicted, would prove to be a 'second and richer Transvaal'.³³

Rhodes had secured the support of the *Pall Mall Gazette* through his burgeoning relationship with its editor, W.T. Stead. The two men met through a mutual acquaintance on 4 April 1889, and established an immediate rapport. Stead later recalled: 'I have never met a man who, upon broad Imperial matters, was so entirely of my way of thinking.'³⁴ Stead's enthusiastic support of Rhodes would survive his tenure as editor of the *Gazette*, later finding expression in his new journal the *Review of Reviews*. Stead would serve as a sometime executor of Rhodes's will, and despite ideological differences regarding the South African War, their friendship would endure.

It must be acknowledged that enthusiasm for the project was by no means restricted to the imperialist press. The London Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* announced that the establishment of a chartered company in Zambesia would 'practically give England the command of all that is really worth having in Africa'.³⁵

By October the British press was extolling the value of the territory based upon the reports of Frank Mandy, a man described by *The Times* as having lived among the Ndebele for many years. Mandy has received little attention in the historiography; however, his lecture at Johannesburg appears to have been particularly influential. It is not clear what, if any, relationship Mandy had with Rhodes at this time; however, the De Beers Mining Engineer Gardner Williams

³³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 May 1889, p.1.

³⁴ Stead, p.81.

³⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 10 June 1889, p.5.

would subsequently identify Mandy as manager of the De Beers compound at Kimberley.³⁶

Referring to the mineral wealth of Zambesia, *The Times* quoted Mandy as having stated that ‘Throughout its greatest extent the country is one vast and very rich goldfield.’³⁷ The *Manchester Guardian* concurred, declaring that ‘Gold is found in every stream throughout the district, and in the soil in veins.’³⁸ Whilst acknowledging that such reports had not been ‘sifted’, the journal concluded:

...there is very general agreement on the head of the mineral riches which abound, and the actual discoveries of similar beds in the Transvaal, where their value has been fully demonstrated, afford strong presumptive evidence in favour of their existence further north.³⁹

It is clear from the public sources that the earlier discoveries in South Africa – diamonds at Kimberley and gold in the Transvaal - had a significant bearing on the manner in which the reports of Zambesia were received; as the *Pall Mall Gazette* observed: ‘the experience of the Diamond Fields and the Transvaal has taught us to believe anything is possible in unknown Africa’.⁴⁰

In contrasting Zambesia with the desolate wastes of its southern neighbour Bechuanaland, *The Times* likened the former to ‘Canaan after the wilderness’, declaring:

If it be not “flowing with milk and honey”, its numerous rivers are either flowing, or have plenty of water in them; there is, too, abundance of cattle and corn and wood, and, above all, it is very rich in gold, copper, iron, and other minerals.⁴¹

The day after the charter was granted the *Daily News* told its readers: ‘Opportunity there is in plenty, and only time is needed for

³⁶ Williams, Gardner Frederick, *The Diamond Mines of South Africa*, MacMillan Co., London 1902, p.409.

³⁷ *The Times*, 5 November 1889, p.4.

³⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 May 1889, p.1.

⁴¹ *The Times*, 15 October 1889, p.8.

the systematic development of what appears to be potentially one of the richest virgin districts of the whole bounteous earth.⁴²

The value of the territory was not to be measured in mineral wealth alone. As the *Saturday Review* acknowledged, the prevailing belief among European nations that suitable 'swarming grounds' were needed to accommodate the surplus population at home, was a significant consideration in the pursuit of African empire.⁴³

Accounts of Zambesia's potential as a field for European emigration were most favourable. Drawing once again on the descriptions of Frank Mandy, the *Manchester Guardian* stated that 'The soil and climate are said to be exceptionally favourable for agricultural enterprise...Children of European parents who are born there thrive...'⁴⁴

A very strong Darwinian undercurrent underpinned much of the rhetoric regarding the need for housing, health, and employment. Surprisingly, in light of its later opposition to Rhodes, the *Manchester Guardian* typified this belief when it declared:

Now is the time for races which have it in them to expand. A century hence and perhaps it will be too late. The surplus population of the English-speaking peoples is the largest in the world. It is spreading itself over the world, filling all the waste places.⁴⁵

The popular laudation of the territory did not pass entirely unchallenged, dissentient voices were occasionally heard above the popular clamour, particularly in the months following the institution of the B.S.A. Company. Critics accused the Government of having failed to learn the lessons of previous commercial enterprises in Africa. They argued that such schemes had followed a depressingly familiar pattern. Having been greeted with great fanfare by an unsuspecting public, amid talk of golden concessions and civilising

⁴² *Daily News*, 1 November 1889, p.5.

⁴³ *Saturday Review*, 9 November 1889, pp.507-508.

⁴⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

missions, they had invariably ended with financial collapse, the intervention of the Imperial Government, and with the institution of a Parliamentary inquiry to debate the causes of failure. Specifically, there were concerns as to both the commercial value of the territory, and its suitability as a field for emigration.

The popular maxim, 'Trade Follows the Flag', was by no means universally admitted. J. Pope Hennessy, writing in the *Nineteenth Century*, argued that there was little evidence to substantiate the claim that great commercial benefit could be derived from the African interior. Hennessy pointed to the fact that British imports into Java in 1888, that is to say imports into a single foreign colony, exceeded the value of British imports into all of her West African colonies combined.⁴⁶

As for its alleged mineral wealth, the writer Edward Dicey argued that such claims could not be substantiated; in any event the cost of extraction and transportation might prove prohibitively expensive. Dicey himself prescribed a policy of 'masterly inactivity' in the African interior.⁴⁷ Such a policy had been advocated by Hennessy in an earlier article entitled 'The African Bubble', in which he had argued that Britain ought to stand aloof from the African scramble, and in-so doing exploit the land-hunger of continental rivals by exchanging strategic locations in Africa and elsewhere for British acquiescence in the interior.⁴⁸

In estimating the value of the territory both Dicey and Hennessy questioned its suitability as a field for British emigration. The climate was not suited to hard manual labour, while the African soil could only be rendered beneficial with significant capital investment. Moreover, it was argued that the artisan would never choose Central Africa over more desirable destinations in the English-speaking world. The notion that Central Africa had once been home to an

⁴⁶ *Nineteenth Century*, September 1890, pp.478-487 (p.479).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*: September 1890, pp.488-500 (p.496).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*: July 1890, pp.1-4.

advanced civilisation portending a prosperous future was dismissed in such quarters. Dicey himself declared that only in Rider Haggard's romances could any evidence be found that Central Africa contained 'the vestiges of any civilisation higher than that of the pastoral savage, either in the present or the past'.⁴⁹

Throughout the Liberal press there was the familiar expression that limitless expansion would ultimately weaken the Empire, however, this sense of caution appears to have been overshadowed by the desire not to fall behind continental rivals in the race for African Empire. The *Daily News*, for example, while declaring itself opposed to 'the indefinite extension of our territory', proceeded to justify such extensions if the territory in question was deemed valuable.⁵⁰

According to Dicey this unwillingness to be left behind extended to the wider society. He acknowledged that African imperialism had great popular appeal, and that successive British administrations had been dragged reluctantly into the African scramble. Despite his own reservations, he admitted that public opinion in Britain had declared itself 'most unmistakably against the notion of our being left behind in the race for the possession of the equatorial regions of Africa'.⁵¹

V

The significance of missionary and humanitarian opinion in shaping British attitudes to imperialism had long been recognised. As Hennessy demonstrated in his article, 'Is Central Africa worth having?' concession hunters had long understood the symbolic importance of couching their commercial objectives in philanthropic terms.⁵² The missionary movement was identified as one of the three

⁴⁹ Ibid: September 1890, pp.488-500(p.494).

⁵⁰ *Daily News*, 23 July 1890, p.5.

⁵¹ *Nineteenth Century*, September 1890, pp.488-500 (p.489).

⁵² Ibid: September 1890, pp.478-487.

principal lobby's liable to campaign for Imperial acquisitions, along with concessionaires and trading companies.⁵³ It is unsurprising, therefore, that missionary and humanitarian concerns should have formed such a significant element of the national debate pertaining to the acquisition of the charter.

What may be broadly termed the civilising mission in Zambesia began, as with its commercial exploitation, with the Portuguese. In the middle of the sixteenth century the Jesuit Goncalo da Silveira became the first missionary to teach Christianity in Zambesia. Silveira's brief apostolate was brought to an untimely end when he was executed in 1561 at the behest of Mohammedan traders.⁵⁴ The death of the young Jesuit proved an ill-omen. For the next three hundred years those who followed in Silveira's footsteps would experience only varying degrees of failure.

The establishment of Protestant missionary societies in Britain coincided with the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century. The most significant of these as far as Zambesia was concerned was the London Missionary Society (LMS) founded in 1795. The society owed its existence in Matabeleland to the friendship of the missionary Robert Moffat and the then Ndebele King Mzilikazi, which culminated in the establishment of the society's first mission station at Inyati in December 1859. As the historian W.F. Rea has stated: 'It was the beginning...of what must be one of the most extraordinary missions in Christian history, a mission in which men prayed and worked and suffered and died for over thirty years without a single convert.'⁵⁵

Additional LMS stations were subsequently established in Matabeleland at Hope Fountain and Shiloh, and in 1879 the Jesuits

⁵³ Ibid: September 1890, pp.488-500 (pp.495-496).

⁵⁴ For translations of Goncalo da Silveira's letters concerning the first Christian mission in Rhodesia see: Theal, George McCall, *Records of South Eastern Africa: Vol. II*, Government of the Cape Colony 1898.

⁵⁵ Rea, W.F., *The Missionary Factor in Southern Rhodesia*, Historical Association of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1962, p.7.

returned to found the Zambesi Mission. In the meantime, the Ndebele's instinctive distrust of missionaries had resulted in the expulsion of Francois Coillard's party representing the Missionary Society of Paris (SMEP). The surviving missionaries, notwithstanding their denominational differences, were united in their hardships, frustrations, and convictions that the principal stumbling block in the pursuit of converts was the dictatorial rule of the new Ndebele King, Lobengula. The extent of the challenge facing missionaries in Zambesia was alluded to by Lovett in his history of the LMS:

The savage nature of the Matabele, their tribal system, superstitions, military code, polygamy, and haughty arrogance, the result of long years of most successful warfare and bloodshed, rendered them in all South Africa least likely to accept readily the Gospel.⁵⁶

Robert Moffat had previously affirmed that there was little hope of the gospel finding willing adherents among the Ndebele until a revolution could be effected in the governance of the people.⁵⁷ It is evident from his diaries that Friar Peter Prestage of the Zambesi Mission concurred,⁵⁸ while Francois Coillard of the SMEP later wrote: 'I do not know which ought most to astonish the Christian world, the barrenness of this mission field or the courage and perseverance of these noble servants of Christ who have for so long ploughed and sown in tears.'⁵⁹ A contemporary article of the LMS *Chronicle* advised its readers that 'under the tyrannical and obstinately heathen rule of Lobengula, it [was] practically impossible for any Matabeles to become avowed Christians...'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Lovett, Richard, *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795-1895*, Vol. I, Henry Frowde, London 1899, p.625.

⁵⁷ Moffat, Robert, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, John Snow, London 1842, p.552.

⁵⁸ Prestage, Peter, and Rea, William Francis, *Pre-Pioneer Missionary in Southern Rhodesia*, Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu Extractum e vol. XXXII-1963, Rome, 1963, p.366 (Diary entry: Friday 21 March 1884).

⁵⁹ Coillard, Francois, *On the Threshold of Central Africa*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1897, p.44.

⁶⁰ *London Missionary Society Chronicle*, February 1890, p52.

From the moment the prospect of a new chartered company was first reported in the spring of 1889, the issue was linked to the plight of British missionaries in the Lake Nyasa region, the territory to the immediate north of Rhodes's principal commercial targets. With the Portuguese coveting the Shire Highlands and the banks of the Zambezi, and with the existing African Lakes Company – itself a lay section of the missionary societies whose agents were established on Lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika – exhausted from having carried the struggle so long, it was inevitable that a new chartered company should be considered a solve-all.

Almost the first reference to the charter in *The Times* highlighted the new company's potential for strengthening the arm of the Lakes Company and for the promotion of legitimate trade. The plight of the region's missionaries elicited an emotional response in Britain, for as *The Times* reminded its readers, this was a country 'sacred to the name of Livingstone'. Under the protection of a chartered company this proud legacy could be augmented, and further missionary centres established, 'the influences of which might spread over all the region'. As the African Lakes Company had created the Stevenson Road, so Rhodes's Chartered Company would extend railway lines from the Cape frontier to the Zambezi. 'The telegraph would advance simultaneously and roads practicable for wagons would be made in all directions.'⁶¹

The Times' article proved particularly influential, being reprinted elsewhere, most notably in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and also in the official journal of the Anti-Slavery Society, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. The latter society, along with its sister organisation, the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS), was one of the principal humanitarian organisations dedicated to the protection of indigenous peoples. The Anti-Slavery Society's focus in Africa included such places as Uganda, Zanzibar, Madagascar, and the colonies of rival European

⁶¹ *The Times*, 29 May 1889, p.6.

powers. It was supportive of the British imperial presence in its various guises, while adopting a position that was generally anti-Portuguese, anti-Boer, and opposed to those warlike tribes, such as the Ndebele, who were deemed to be obstructing the progress of missionaries and reformers, and perpetuating slavery.

Echoing the concerns of *The Times*, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* of spring 1889 turned its attentions to Nyasaland. From this region, the Society insisted, both 'Slave-hunting Arabs' and the Portuguese were to be excluded. The Zambezi must remain freely navigable, thereby ensuring that British influence would not be 'locked out' of the country. The Society insisted that the Lakes Company - which was praised for having established 'an honest and strictly legitimate trade with the natives of Central Africa' - must be strengthened.⁶² With these objects in mind the Anti-Slavery Society welcomed the prospect of a new Chartered Company which would seek to defend British interests in the region while offering protection to Africans. Once again, the Society evoked the name of Livingstone and expressed the hope that Rhodes's Company would continue the great missionary-explorer's work. In this way, the journal concluded: 'England, though too tardily, will yet be able to let in the light to the very heart of the Dark Continent.'⁶³

At the beginning of June 1889 further details were released to the press confirming the intension to incorporate the African Lakes Company with Rhodes's new enterprise. Already the *Saturday Review* was referring to the new company as a 'chartered extension of the present African Lakes Company', demonstrating the extent to which the B.S.A. Company was interpreted as a solution to the territorial disputes in Nyasaland.⁶⁴

In the weeks immediately prior to the granting of the charter enough was known of the prospective company's responsibilities and

⁶² *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, May/June 1889, p.120.

⁶³ *Ibid*: pp.120-121.

⁶⁴ *Saturday Review*, 1 June 1889, pp.657-658.

field of operations to permit a more precise appraisal of its humanitarian potential. Reviewing the new chartered company's commitments in mid-October *The Times* concluded:

It must be especially gratifying to philanthropists to find that the Company is empowered to abolish by degrees, "any system of slave trade or domestic servitude in the territories aforesaid", and what will be deemed of equal importance, to regulate the traffic in liquors in such a way as to prevent their sale to the natives.⁶⁵

In this regard *The Times* paid a personal tribute to Rhodes himself, under whose guidance the journal declared, as many as 700 African workers at the Kimberley mines had been made virtually teetotal.⁶⁶

This faith in progress, the sense that in its expansion the British Empire was fulfilling a naturally ordained mission to civilise the barbarous regions of the world, was exemplified by the *Manchester Guardian's* description of the Chartered Company's role both as a commercial asset and as a harbinger of civilisation, a civilisation which was to be very specifically 'English':

We, as members of the English-speaking race, see the movement gladly, and watch with equanimity the approach of a day in which there will be no more world to explore, no dark continents, no desert islands, no impenetrable forests, no unmeasured mountains, but everywhere a network of civilisation, through which English railways, English ships, and English telegraphs shall carry English conceptions of liberty and peace and progress...⁶⁷

This commitment to the civilizational benefits of empire, in addition to its material advantages, also found expression in the House of Commons. The Conservative MP Sir George Baden-Powell argued that the occupation of the African interior was 'not only to our interest, but also our duty and obligation'.⁶⁸ Rhodes's old acquaintance Swift MacNeil, while opposed to the use of chartered companies, was nevertheless clear in his conviction that Christianity

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 15 October 1889, p.8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*: p.8.

⁶⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

⁶⁸ HC Deb 22 May 1890, Vol. 344 cc1632-73.

and the suppression of the slave trade would be Africa's salvation, declaring:

Wherever Christianity goes slavery ceases. Slavery is the open sore of Africa, and it has been described as the "heart disease" of that country. It is because I believe Christianity will stop slavery in Africa that I am glad the English Government is there, though I am very sorry because of the means.⁶⁹

Baron Henry de Worms, Under-Secretary for the Colonies, and the man charged with justifying the granting of the charter in the Commons, placed missionary and humanitarian concerns at the heart of his defence, stressing 'the enormous civilising influence which this Charter must exercise over the vast territory to be administered by the Company'.⁷⁰

The Directors of the new enterprise were only too aware of the popular and influential support liable to accrue to the new Company from emphasising its humanitarian objectives. Speaking at the Mansion House, Fife insisted that the Company was not 'merely a trade association', and assured his audience that it would never 'lose sight of the high functions it ha[d] undertaken', namely 'the civilisation and the elevation of the aborigines of that long-neglected country...'. In response the *LMS Chronicle* declared:

This is all that one could wish. Every philanthropist, and especially every friend of foreign missions, will note this statement with great satisfaction; and if the Company steadily adheres to this policy, it will confer incalculable benefit upon the native tribes of South Africa.⁷¹

The 'civilising mission' itself was ill-defined. For a majority it appears to have meant little more than the institution of order, peace, and good government, for others the propagation of Christianity and the transmission of broader western cultural practices also figured prominently. There were also conflicting views as to the capacity of Britain's new African subjects to absorb such influences; were they to

⁶⁹ HC Deb 13 February 1890, Vol. 341, cc211-94.

⁷⁰ Ibid., also *The Times*, 14 February 1890, p.10.

⁷¹ *London Missionary Society Chronicle*, March 1890, pp.67-69.

be maintained in their present state or were they to adopt the habits of their rulers? Were they capable of civilisation now, in the future, or not at all? The ambiguity of the 'civilising mission' reflected the plurality of racial views held by the late Victorians. This was a culture in which biblically derived notions of monogenesis and other residual ideologies of human equality competed with new scientifically derived notions of permanent, inheritable racial characteristics.

The transformation in attitudes can be charted in the public sources and in the attitudes of contemporary commentators to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. In his *Missionary Labours* of 1842 Robert Moffat's appraisal of Africans broadly corresponded with those of his generation, the belief that the condition of man was principally determined by environmental factors and was by no means fixed.⁷²

Space does not permit a detailed examination of the scientific and cultural developments which had altered British perceptions of race by mid-century. It is significant to note, however, that by 1860 the idea of separate physical races was widespread; missionary propaganda stressing the necessity of European intervention had reinforced notions of racial inequality, perceptions which increasingly found reflection in the new visual culture of popular periodicals. Scientific developments, and a desire to unite the un-enfranchised at home in the creation of a specifically British racial and cultural identity had all played their part.⁷³

In considering the Chartered Company's responsibilities to its new subjects, contemporary commentators betrayed the influence of the latest ideology concerning the meaning of race. This late 19th century conception of the 'civilising mission' was given expression by the explorer Verney Lovett Cameron when, in discussing the appropriate treatment of Africans, he wrote:

⁷² Moffat, pp.193-194.

⁷³ Beasley, Edward, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race*, Routledge, New York 2010, pp.15-18.

By civilization I do not mean that we should force an imitation of European modes and methods of living upon people who, owing to race and the conditions under which they must live, are not adapted to receive them, but that we should aid them to progress upon their own lines, to choose the good and reject the evil, and instil lessons of morality, industry, and sobriety, and, above all, a sense of what true freedom is.⁷⁴

The operative phrase here is, 'owing to race', the implication being that attempts to impart European influences would be a futile exercise. Between those commentators who inferred permanent racial distinction and those who held fast to enlightenment notions of equality, there was a middle course which perhaps represented the majority view, namely the belief that racial inequality, while a contemporary reality, need not be a permanent condition. The Africans' capacity for advancement was considered an unknown quantity; in the meantime, a patriarchal administration would provide justice and security. This perception of the African as a child, 'backward', unequal, but by no means bereft of hope, was epitomised by the explorer and geologist Joseph Thomson:

The Negro requires to be taken energetically in hand, as does the wayward child who has yet to learn what is good for it and who, only after years of discipline, may hope to pass from leading-strings to independent action. For years read generations as applied to the Negro.⁷⁵

This attitude closely resembled Rhodes's own. Throughout his career Rhodes would liken Africans to children, human beings 'emerging from barbarism', who represented an earlier stage in mankind's development – inferior - though perhaps not destined to remain so. Rhodes conceded that what Africans might achieve in a hundred years was impossible to tell, in the meantime, the

⁷⁴ *National Review*, August 1890, pp.723-740 (p.731).

⁷⁵ *Fortnightly Review*, August 1889, pp.173-185.

advancement of individual Africans was to be rewarded but not at the expense of white supremacy.⁷⁶

One thing was certain, if the notion of a 'civilising mission' was to be advanced in support of the charter, its necessity had to be demonstrated beyond doubt. In the case of the Chartered Company's territories it was well known that the allegedly peaceful and industrious Shona people were oppressed by their Ndebele overlords and subjected to perennial raids, while both appeared threatened by the advance of the Boer and the Portuguese. In this way the protection of the indigenous population - and the Shona people in particular - became a prime justification for British intervention. The attitude of *The Times* was in many ways typical: 'What about the natives? – the "poor" natives, some may be inclined to say, but in this case the term would be misapplied...' The journal explained how the Bechuana chiefs and the rulers of adjacent territories had welcomed British protection from 'the land-grabbing white freebooters and the merciless invasions of the unscrupulous and cruel Lobengula, Chief of Matabeleland'.⁷⁷ *The Times* suggested that the inhabitants of Mashonaland would find the presence of Rhodes's Company equally beneficial, stating:

They are now maintained in peaceful possession of their lands; they have been assured of all the rights as to planting and hunting which they asked for; they contribute voluntarily a moderate tax for administration; and they may now go on increasing their flocks and herds, and acquiring all the civilisation of which they are capable...⁷⁸

Talk of 'civilising missions' unquestionably appealed to missionary and humanitarian groups anxious to secure for themselves a foothold in the African interior, it also no doubt had a certain popular appeal, and was useful in veiling self-interest. It is clear, however, from the

⁷⁶ For Rhodes's attitudes to Africans see Samkange, S.J.T., *What Rhodes Really said about Africans*, Harare Publishing House 1982; also Vindex, particularly Rhodes's speech on moving the second reading of the Glen Grey Act in the Cape House, 30 July 1894, pp.371-390.

⁷⁷ *The Times*, 15 October 1889, p.8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

public debate surrounding the charter that the cause of 'civilising' Africa was hardly greeted with universal acclamation. In the first place it was far from clear that the imposition of European institutions would benefit Africans at all. Amid the popular clamour for the expansion of 'civilisation' it is possible to detect the occasional dissenting voice questioning whether Africans themselves would be the true beneficiaries.

J. Pope Hennessy wrote of his experiences in Kambia, Sierra Leone, which at the time of his visit was under 'negro administration only'. The town, Hennessy explained, appeared 'admirably governed', remarking that he had never seen 'a happier population'. Hennessy's population was 'cheerful, contented, industrious...What a contrast', he concluded, 'between the smiling faces to be seen in the crowded streets of that negro town and the careworn faces of Cheapside...Will the Chartered Companies increase or diminish the happiness of such people?' Hennessy asked, before admitting that this question was 'hardly noticed' by his countrymen, though it might reasonably be considered 'perhaps the most important of all'.⁷⁹

The Radical journal *Reynolds's Newspaper* was even more explicit in its assertion that the 'civilising mission', for all its high moral rhetoric, had cost indigenous peoples more than they had ever benefited in return. The Sudanese, the Zulu, and the New Zealand Maori had all experienced British 'civilisation' before and had reaped only misery. 'Imperial policy such as displayed in Mashonaland is a grand thing to the aggressors', *Reynolds's* concluded, 'but it generally means extermination to the natives.'⁸⁰

To others the 'civilising mission' was simply a disingenuous argument, it was neither championed for its beneficence nor condemned for its harmful effects; rather it was a red herring intended to conceal less altruistic intentions. While such opinions

⁷⁹ *Nineteenth Century*, September 1890, pp.478-487(p.486).

⁸⁰ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 26 April 1891, p.4.

were commonplace among Radical critics of imperial expansion, it is interesting to note that even among imperialists themselves there was discomfiture as to the use of the term as a justification for imperial expansion. The imperialist Edward Dicey dismissed the suggestion that Britain was annexing Central Africa to evangelise and civilise the Dark Continent. He objected to what he considered the fundamental hypocrisy of the argument, urging those concerned to acknowledge that the objective was to expand trade and secure national interests, rather than 'crusade' on behalf of civilisation and religion.⁸¹ In a similar vein the *Saturday Review* - a fervently imperialist journal - admitted: 'We lay little or no stress on the slave-trade argument, for which we care very little...We only dwell on the strictly Imperial and strictly commercial interests involved.'⁸²

VI

Chartered Companies were nothing new on the British political landscape, having been employed since the Middle Ages for the purpose of promoting exploration and colonisation, and for expanding trade. To a significant extent the British Empire owed its existence to the work of chartered companies; famous examples included the Hudson's Bay Company in North America and the British East India Company, both accredited with having pioneered British rule within their respective spheres. Within this context the resurgence of chartered companies in the 1880s should more accurately be considered the continuation of a familiar agency for the establishment of British trade and colonization.

The exploration of Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century alerted merchants and investors to the continent's commercial opportunities. Rhodes's B.S.A Company, chartered in 1889, had been preceded by the Royal Niger Company (1886) and

⁸¹ *Nineteenth Century*, September 1890, pp.488-500 (pp.495-496).

⁸² *Saturday Review*, 25 July 1891, pp.98-99.

by the Imperial British East Africa Company (1888). In terms of both financial resources and territorial ambition, however, the B.S.A. Company signified the creation of an enormously powerful entity, which drew more accurate comparisons with the East India Company than with the African companies which had preceded it; as the *Manchester Guardian* explained: 'The Company is, in fact, endowed with all the rights and attributes of a political state. It is, indeed, at the birth of a new State that we assist.'⁸³ It was the extraordinary power of the B.S.A. Company which brought the controversial employment of chartered companies to the fore, triggering a public debate as to their suitability as instruments of imperial expansion.

The principal objections to the B.S.A. Company rested primarily upon economic considerations, with missionary and humanitarian factors forming powerful ancillary arguments. It is significant that in his public and private appeals against the charter the missionary John Mackenzie – whom Rhodes had previously opposed in Bechuanaland – should himself have stressed economic concerns which, from a missionary's perspective, surely did not constitute his primary objection. Perhaps Mackenzie was aware that such arguments would be more persuasive to hard-headed government officials than the customary entreaties as to aboriginal rights. Writing later in the *Contemporary Review* Mackenzie insisted that it had been the frugality of Rhodes's chartered scheme which had appealed most to the Imperial Government, suggesting that he knew well enough where the Government's priorities lay.⁸⁴

Opponents of the Chartered Company frequently professed themselves to be guardians of the public purse, asserting that the Chartered Company's inevitable transgressions would burden the British tax payer. In Parliament Sir John Swinburne warned that with such extensive powers, relatively unfettered by officialdom, the Chartered Company would soon find itself embroiled in a 'native war'.

⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

⁸⁴ *Contemporary Review*, November 1889, pp.753-776.

It is telling that Swinburne appeared less eager to evoke humanitarian concern, than to express the fear that such a war would cost the Imperial Government 'half-a-dozen millions sterling before we have done with it'.⁸⁵ Sir George Campbell agreed, declaring that 'through the action of these companies we are led into annexation which is not desired by Parliament or the country'.⁸⁶

A common objection to the Chartered Company resulted from an ideological opposition to monopoly; particularly among Liberals who remained committed to the economic principles of Free Trade. The charter itself prohibited the granting of monopolies, however, Swinburne argued that the Company's right to grant concessions for 'banks, railways, tramways, telegraphs, docks, waterworks, and stores', would create monopolies in all but name.⁸⁷ In a letter to the Colonial Office Mackenzie likened Zambesia to Kimberley before Rhodes's amalgamation of the diamond mines. Limits placed upon the ownership of claims had resulted in a competitive Free Trade environment which had enriched the entire community; all this had changed with the institution of De Beers. It was essential, Mackenzie argued, that the wealth of the country be employed to benefit all its citizens, that commercial affairs be left in the hands of commercial men, and that the diplomatic and administrative business of the country be placed in the hands of responsible British officers. 'In short,' Mackenzie concluded, 'British administration and no monopoly would express my meaning.'⁸⁸

Opponents argued that the Chartered Company represented a questionable investment to the tax payer. In the event of crisis the latter would be expected to provide the Chartered Company with all necessary assistance. Conversely, in times of plenty the economic advantages would accrue to a narrow body of men, namely the

⁸⁵ HC Deb 26 August 1889, Vol. 340 cc562-570.

⁸⁶ HC Deb 25 February 1890, Vol. 341 cc1232-49.

⁸⁷ HC Deb 26 August 1889, Vol. 340 cc562-570.

⁸⁸ CO 879/30/372, no. 48, Rev. John Mackenzie to Colonial Office (Lord Knutsford), 10 April 1889.

officials and shareholders of the Company. This issue was raised in the Commons by the Conservative MP John M. Maclean who, while professing a belief in Britain's capacity for imperial expansion in Africa, questioned the use of chartered companies for precisely this reason, advocating instead direct Imperial rule.⁸⁹ In opposing the extension of Chartered Company rule over Bechuanaland, John Mackenzie argued that it would be 'inconceivable', in light of tax payer investment in the region, that the Imperial Government would consent to hand over to a commercial company land which already belonged in effect to the British people.⁹⁰

Economic considerations may have predominated, however, humanitarian and missionary concerns constituted powerful ancillary objections to chartered rule. In the *Contemporary Review* Mackenzie echoed the familiar criticism that commercial companies made poor administrators. This, Mackenzie insisted, had 'notoriously' proven the case in India, and would be proven so in Africa. Chartered companies, he argued, had a tendency to reduce indigenous peoples to willing accomplices in their own commercial schemes, either as valuable customers or as a willing labour force. 'As soon as natives submit to the company and consent to trade with it', Mackenzie explained, 'they are in a state of perfection, from the trading company's point of view. Therefore the missionary idea is unwelcome – it is "interference".'⁹¹

In addition to Mackenzie, the most formidable opponent of the Chartered Company, particularly from a humanitarian perspective, was the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS). Founded in 1836 the APS, in common with the missionary societies which had preceded it, drew its inspiration from the evangelical revival at the end of the 18th century, and from the enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality. Important pre-cursors in the establishment of the APS were the anti-

⁸⁹ HC Deb 22 May 1890 Vol. 344 cc1632-73; see also *The Times*, 23 May 1890, p.6.

⁹⁰ CO 879/30/372, no. 48, Rev. John Mackenzie to Colonial Office (Lord Knutsford), 10 April 1889.

⁹¹ *Contemporary Review*, November 1889, pp.753-776 (p.768).

slavery movement, from which the Society would draw many of its early leaders, and the Select Committee on Aborigines (1835 – 1837), which presented a damning indictment of the Empire's relations with indigenous peoples around the world, and from which the APS would derive many of its ideological objectives.

The influence of humanitarian societies such as the APS reached their zenith in the 1830s and 1840s, at a time when the leaders of the movement were successful in raising anti-slavery sentiment almost to the level of a religion in Britain.⁹² By the 1850s, however, the Society's influence had begun to wane, its principal tenets undermined by many of the same influences which had afflicted the missionary movement. The growing influence of scientific doctrines concerning racial difference combined with the real world experiences of the Indian Mutiny (1857) and the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica (1865) brought into question the principal of 'equality before God' upon which such movements had been founded. Similarly, in Africa itself, the failure of a series of initiatives intended to eradicate the slave trade by the expansion of legitimate trade and the spread of western influence deeply affected humanitarian optimism and confidence in the moral powers of free commerce.⁹³

The APS divided opinion in Britain in the 1880s and its relevance in the last quarter of the nineteenth century has continued to generate debate. To its supporters the rapid expansion of the Empire in Africa meant the Society's existence had never been more relevant. The APS, in the words of its leader Henry Fox Bourne, would 'stand between natives and white men', and ensure that in the ensuing scramble the former's rights would be protected.⁹⁴ To the Society's opponents its policies were anachronistic and sentimental,

⁹² Williams, E., *Capitalism and Slavery*, University of North Carolina Press, 1944, p.181.

⁹³ Whitehead, Rachel, 'The Aborigines' Protection Society and the Safeguarding of African interests in Rhodesia: 1889-1930', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford 1975, p.43.

⁹⁴ *Contemporary Review*, September 1889, pp.346-360 (p.347).

its members deluded hypocrites who, possessing little or no practical experience of Africa or Africans, were a perpetual stumbling block to the continent's economic development. While some historians have reasonably asserted that the Society's influence declined as the century drew to a close,⁹⁵ others have argued that in the 1880s humanitarian movements enjoyed a prestige they had not experienced since the 1830s.⁹⁶ It would appear more accurately that while the Society's formal political influence had declined, it nevertheless continued to play an important ideological role in the imperial debate.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the APS formed a reciprocal relationship with the Imperial Government which would prove mutually beneficial. The Society derived one of its principal tenets from the Select Committee Report of 1837, which stipulated that responsibility for the care of indigenous peoples should rest with the Imperial authority, not with colonial officials or with commercial companies.⁹⁷ This prejudice against white settlers - in addition to its ideological commitment to Free Trade - constituted a significant factor in the Society's opposition to the charter in 1889. As James Heartfield has argued it was tactically more convenient for the APS to champion the Queen's supremacy than to argue in favour of African rights directly, to do otherwise would have rendered the Society 'out of step' with popular opinion.⁹⁸ The APS was also useful to the Imperial Government in that the Society not only championed its authority and vindicated its interference in the colonial sphere; it endowed the imperial creed with a benevolent aura which would serve it well into the 20th century.

⁹⁵ *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 'The Aborigines' Protection Society: A Pressure Group in Colonial Policy', by Kenneth D. Nworah, Vol. 5 No. 1, 1971, pp.79-91.

⁹⁶ Whitehead, p.293.

⁹⁷ *Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes*, William Ball, London 1837, pp.117-118.

⁹⁸ Heartfield, James, *The Aborigines' Protection Society*, Hurst and Company, London 2011, p.46.

The most conspicuous role played by the APS in the campaign against the charter was the breakfast the Society hosted at the Westminster Palace Hotel for Lobengula's envoys. According to the APS the purpose of the meeting was to warn the British public, Lobengula, and his advisers as to the dangers of entering into schemes which would deliver Matabeleland into the hands of 'adventurers, whose interests are likely to clash with those of the natives'.⁹⁹ The attendees constituted a veritable who's who of Victorian humanitarians and philanthropists, including C.H. Allen, Secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Rev. J. Grant Mills, Secretary of the Native Races and Liquor Traffic Committee, Rev. R. Wardlaw Thompson, Foreign Secretary of the London Missionary Society, as well as Rev. John Mackenzie.

The sentiments expressed at the breakfast echo the fact that by the 1880s the consensus among humanitarians was that the most effective means of securing African interests was by annexation. The APS was by no means anti-imperialist, despite accusations to the contrary. As Fox Bourne explained:

The Society has frequently been accused of favouring a "Little Englander" policy. This is an error. It has invariably protested against the spoliation of natives, whether by force or by fraud, against all forms of aggression and misgovernment; but it has as invariably supported all honest and honourable projects for such extension of British authority as is calculated to benefit both rulers and ruled.¹⁰⁰

The humanitarians who attended the breakfast were opposed to imperialism by commercial company, not to imperialism itself. On the contrary, there was an acknowledgement that these 'empty lands' could not remain so indefinitely. Through its journal, the *Aborigines' Friend*, the Society warned its readers that 'these vast spaces of unoccupied and unused territory in South Africa and other parts of

⁹⁹ *Aborigines' Friend*, May/June 1889, p.557.

¹⁰⁰ Fox Bourne, H.R. *The Aborigines' Protection Society*, P.S. King and Son, London 1899, p.42.

the world cannot remain as they are'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Mackenzie told those assembled at the APS breakfast that Matabeleland would never be the same following the discovery of gold. It could only be hoped that arrangements could be made which would allow the prospectors access to the country and enable them to live prosperously side-by-side with the Ndebele.¹⁰²

The Induna's, for their part, appear to have been under the misapprehension that the APS and their friends represented a legislative branch of the Imperial Government. The Hon. Lyulph Stanley sought to dispel such notions by reminding the Induna's that in reality the Society's powers were limited to urging the Imperial Government to do the right thing 'by working upon public opinion'.¹⁰³

Having expressed the wish that the Imperial Government adopt a consistent policy towards the region and not shirk its responsibilities, attendees at the APS breakfast charged the concession hunters with seeking to exploit native ignorance. The Conservative MP Sir John Colomb expressed the wish that the Ndebele 'would not be led into a trap laid by concessionaires, and that they might rely upon the honesty of the English people to protect them from being made the dupes of scheming men',¹⁰⁴ while the Liberal MP Albert, 4th Earl Grey, in a letter delivered at the breakfast expressed the hope that the meeting would be a significant expression of public opinion in favour of granting Lobengula the protection he had applied for.¹⁰⁵

VII

If the resurrection of chartered companies struck some as a retrograde action, others welcomed a return to what they considered to be Britain's imperial tradition. Far from being a sign of government

¹⁰¹ *Aborigines' Friend*, June 1889, p.581.

¹⁰² *Ibid*: pp.583-584.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*: p.584.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*: pp.580-581.

indifference and national weakness, such companies appeared to epitomise the colonising genius of the British race. In an article for the *Fortnightly Review* the celebrated hunter Frederick Courteney Selous refuted the stigmatisation of concession hunters: “Adventurers!” Yes, and not, after all, a term of reproach to an Englishman, for surely Clive and Warren Hastings were adventurers, and adventurers have made the British Empire what it is.’¹⁰⁶

The decentralised nature of British political and economic life had long been recognised as providing a key advantage over continental rivals. This sense of national pride in British individualism was expressed by the *Manchester Guardian*, which boasted: ‘Of all the nations of Europe England is the only one where individual initiative and private wealth are found ready to devote themselves to schemes of such great public significance.’ Having referenced the role of ‘public-spirited individuals’ in forging the British Empire, the *Guardian* concluded:

It will be only when we find that there are no more Englishmen ready to conceive and to carry out such tasks as those which Mr Rhodes has planned for himself and the Company he has founded that we shall begin to call aloud for the State interference by means of which less energetic peoples build up their monuments of public fame.¹⁰⁷

To their supporters, chartered companies promised an end to Britain’s vacillating policy in Africa. Companies such as Rhodes’s B.S.A. Company would not be susceptible to the whim of individual ministers or to fluctuations in public opinion. Under Company rule the territories would be governed by men with an understanding of local conditions, profit-driven men of action, who would accelerate the development of Britain’s African colonies and put an end to the spirit of inertia which had paralysed the development of both trade and civilisation in the Crown Colonies of West Africa.

¹⁰⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, May 1889, pp.661-676.

¹⁰⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

Verney Lovett Cameron - who claimed to be the first advocate of the modern chartered company - wrote of how 'tedious and prolonged correspondence with the permanent officials at home' had paralysed local administration, and how a parsimonious culture in which Governors believed that maintaining a healthy exchequer was their principal duty, had starved the Crown Colonies of investment. The purpose of a commercial company on the other hand was profit, and this would provide a natural incentive to rapid development.¹⁰⁸

Joseph Thomson also believed that chartered companies would remedy the 'invertebrate policy' of the Imperial Government and emphasised the need for a 'continuous policy'; however, the real significance of Thomson's comments lay in his articulate justification for chartered monopolies. The establishment of a competitive market within a territory was only feasible, he argued, if profitable returns could be guaranteed. This was not the case in Africa due to the vast amount of capital required and the inhospitable conditions that prevailed.¹⁰⁹

If critics considered chartered companies a sign of weakness, their advocates considered them judicious. As the Scramble for Africa intensified, there was a sense that chartered companies were less conspicuous assertions of national power, less likely to offend the sensibilities of both rival Powers and local colonial administrations. The *Saturday Review* described the chartered company as a 'most convenient warming-pan for the State', expressing the view that modern politics dissuaded nation states from behaving antagonistically, and that in this regard chartered companies proved most beneficial.¹¹⁰ They appeared 'to hit the mean between inaction and undue advance as happily as anything that [could] be devised'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *National Review*, June 1890, pp.464-473.

¹⁰⁹ *Fortnightly Review*, August 1889, pp.173-185.

¹¹⁰ *Saturday Review*, 9 November 1889, pp.507-508.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*: 1 June 1889, pp.657-658.

This leads us to perhaps the most important consideration in determining both public and official support for Rhodes's Chartered Company, namely that of cost. Warren and Mackenzie may have envisaged the extension of a vast British protectorate through Bechuanaland to the Zambezi and beyond; however, the Imperial Government had no desire to commit the nation to such an ambitious financial undertaking. Rhodes's Chartered Company on the other hand appeared to solve a myriad of problems with minimal financial obligation. Whether one considers the public pronouncements of officials, or their private correspondence, it is clear that considerations of cost predominated.

In an early exploratory letter to the Colonial Office, Sir Hercules Robinson warned that annexing Zambesia would entail an annual expenditure of not less than a quarter of a million sterling.¹¹² The Colonial Office in-turn reminded the Foreign Office that the Imperial East Africa Company had demonstrated how a Chartered Company could 'to some considerable extent, relieve Her Majesty's Government from diplomatic difficulties and Heavy expenditure'.¹¹³ Finally, in publicly justifying the Government's decision to grant Rhodes the charter, the Under Secretary for the Colonies explicitly stated in the Commons: 'We wish to spread the influence of civilisation to the barbarous districts of Africa without assuming the great responsibilities which attach to an extension of Protectorate...'¹¹⁴

The same concerns predominated in the British press. In its thorough evaluation of the Chartered Company the *Manchester Guardian* concluded that neither the Imperial Government nor the Cape Colony had been able to provide a financially viable alternative to Company rule. With the extension of the Kimberley railway alone costing an estimated half a million pounds, imperial expenditure

¹¹² CO879/30/372, No. 44, Sir Hercules Robinson to Lord Knutsford, 18 March 1889.

¹¹³ CO 879/30/372, no. 76, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 16 May 1889.

¹¹⁴ HC Deb 26 August 1889, Vol. 340 cc562-70.

could not be justified under such circumstances. 'It does not fall within our conception of the duty of Parliament', the *Guardian* told its readers, 'to sanction the expenditure of public money for purposes which could, however incompletely, be defined as commercial speculation.'¹¹⁵ *The Times*, meanwhile, was typical in first stipulating the innumerable benefits likely to accrue to the nation under the Chartered Company while stressing that 'No additional burdens would be laid on this country; no support of a military force required; no additions to our fleet demanded...In this way alone can British South Africa secure its rightful foothold in Central Africa.'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 29 May 1889, p6.

Chapter 4

Rhodes's 'Mowing-Match:'

British Perceptions of the Matabele War

1890 proved to be a momentous year for Rhodes. The pioneers of his new Chartered Company had occupied Mashonaland, in the north eastern region of Lobengula's dominions. By occupying the territory of the King's vassals as opposed to Matabeleland proper, the pioneers had successfully avoided a confrontation with Ndebele impis.

Also in 1890, Rhodes became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, having secured the patronage of the Afrikaner Bond, a group representing the socio-economic interests of the Cape Dutch, and which bore the closest resemblance to a coherent political party in the Cape Assembly. To a significant extent this alliance was founded on Rhodes's support of Afrikaner domestic policies, and the Bond's willingness in-turn to support, or acquiesce, in Rhodes's plans for northern expansion. The alliance also signified Rhodes's commitment to the racial assimilation of the British and Dutch communities at the Cape as a prerequisite to the federation of the South African states.

While Rhodes's political star had risen at the Cape, his Chartered Company had experienced mixed fortunes in Mashonaland. Agreements with Portugal, Germany, and Belgium had secured international recognition for the Company's new sphere of operations. The acquisition of the Lippert Concession had increased the security of the Company's administration, enabling it to grant land titles and thereby raise revenue. Telegraph and railway construction was underway to connect the new colony with the civilisation to the south. Rhodes had also made his first significant foray across the Zambezi River, having brought Barotseland under the Company's

aegis through the acquisition of a concession from the Lozi chief, Lewanika.

Mashonaland was also beset by problems. The landlocked territory was isolated; the railway – though extending northward – had reached no further than Bechuanaland, while access to the coast had been frustrated by a series of disputes with the Company's Portuguese neighbours. Heavy rains had made roads impassable, and an infestation of Tsetse flies had decimated the Company's livestock. In consequence, the transportation of essential supplies and machinery with which to commence mining operations was rendered slow and expensive. Most alarmingly, gold had yet to be discovered in any significant quantities. Damaging reports as to the prospects of 'Charterland' began filtering back to Britain, notably in a series of articles Lord Randolph Churchill had contributed to the *Daily Graphic*. Churchill's reports subsequently republished in his book *Men Mines, and Animals in South Africa*, questioned Mashonaland's gold prospects, its suitability as a field for European emigration, and the Company's capacity to defend its settlers from Ndebele attack.¹

II

The events which culminated in the Matabele War of 1893 largely stemmed from Lobengula's unwillingness to accept that the Company's occupation of Mashonaland had divided his country in two, and that the inhabitants of Mashonaland were no longer his to command. The consensus of opinion, both at the time and since, is that neither Rhodes nor Lobengula actively sought war. The Ndebele King was sensible of the irresistible power of the Europeans; while Rhodes's financial position was precarious, having expended vast

¹ Churchill, Randolph. S, *Men, Mines, and Animals in South Africa*, D. Appleton and Company, New York 1892. For a comprehensive account of the Company's early years in Mashonaland see: Keppel-Jones, Arthur, *Rhodes and Rhodesia*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1983; also Galbraith.

sums on the Company's administration. He also respected the Ndebele as a formidable adversary, and feared both the necessity of imperial intervention in the Company's sphere, and the adverse publicity this would generate at home.

Following a number of minor skirmishes between the Ndebele and the Company's forces, matters came to a head in July 1893 when an Ndebele impi descended on the Company's settlement of Fort Victoria. At the heart of the dispute lay the status of the Shona, the African inhabitants of Mashonaland. To the Chartered Company they represented a labour force, an essential component in the development of the country. To Lobengula they remained his 'dogs' – vassals from whom he could exact tribute.

The crisis was triggered when Shona living in the vicinity of Fort Victoria cut and stole the Company's telegraph wire. As punishment for this offence the Shona paid a fine in cattle – cattle belonging to their suzerain chief Lobengula. The Ndebele impi which attacked Fort Victoria did not do so in search of whites, but rather to punish their Shona subjects, whom they proceeded to murder in cold blood.

In the months that followed relations between the Company and the Ndebele deteriorated. Lobengula was indignant when the Company refused to surrender the remaining Shona still claiming sanctuary at Victoria, and balked at the suggestion of compensating the settlers for damages and the theft of their cattle. The message from Britain was that the Imperial Government would not countenance aggression against Lobengula, however, if the Ndebele were deemed to pose a threat to the settlers, the Company would be entitled to act in self-defence.

In weighing the decision of peace and war Rhodes and Dr Leander Starr Jameson, the Company's administrator in Mashonaland, considered a range of military, political, and economic factors. The morale of both the settlers and their Shona employees figured prominently. If the Company could not demonstrate its ability

to protect either from Lobengula's impis then its position in Mashonaland would become untenable. Linked to this consideration was the belief that the territory could not support two rulers, and that civilization and barbarism could not co-exist. From an economic perspective it was anticipated that the removal of the Ndebele threat would restore public confidence in the Company, and revive its falling share prices. It was also possible that the territory's fabled gold was not in Mashonaland after all, but under Lobengula's kraal. Finally, there was the recollection of the ease with which a small patrol had driven the Ndebele impi from the Victoria district, indicating the likelihood of a decisive victory being achieved without recourse to the use of imperial troops.

To a significant extent the decision rested with Jameson - he was the man on the spot - and his verdict was war.²

III

The threat of war appeared to confirm the rumours that Rhodes had been seeking a pretext for the destruction of the Ndebele from the beginning. Critics accused the Company of having engineered the quarrel, and described the Ndebele threat as a 'figment of the Jingo imagination'.³ The *Daily Chronicle* warned its readers: 'The astute Mr Rhodes and his fellow directors are ingeniously working up the war feeling at the Cape and in this country, and it behoves us to be on our guard against their plausible representations.'⁴

For the Company's supporters there was a more prosaic explanation for the mounting crisis, namely the impossibility of civilization and barbarism coexisting. Perhaps the most widely articulated belief in Britain was the sense of inevitability, the belief that sooner or later Lobengula's power would have to be broken. This

² See Vindex, p.335.

³ *Daily News*, 29 August 1893, p.4.

⁴ *Daily Chronicle*, 17 October 1893, p.4.

sense of inevitability predated the charter itself, and reflected the popular post-Darwinian conviction that the weak must give way to the strong. As W.T. Stead acknowledged, the only questions were those of timing, and whether Rhodes would resort to war or attempt to 'square' Lobengula as was his wont:

Every one knew that the Chartered Company must sooner or later come to collision with the Matabele, but we all hoped it would be later rather than sooner. Mr Rhodes, of course, will do his utmost to square Lobengula, for the Dictator prefers ever to use gold rather than steel...⁵

In offering his opinions to *Dalziel's* agency the celebrated explorer Henry Morton Stanley insisted that the future of Africa was destined to be white, that tribes such as the Ndebele were an anachronism in the modern world, and that no permanent peace could be established while Lobengula remained at large:

The coming conflict is the natural outcome of the advance of civilisation from the southern portion of the African continent. It was bound to be and will surprise no one...There is a stone set rolling on the African continent which no black power may stay or turn.⁶

The rising tide of European civilization stood primed to sweep the last of the great warrior tribes from South Africa and there was an almost universal acceptance that this would be in compliance with natural law. If there was a difference of interpretation, it was the belief on the one hand that the inevitable destruction of the Ndebele military state would benefit the Africans - not least the Shona - who might flourish under British protection, and those who conveyed a sense of melancholic resignation.⁷ In such quarters there were no illusions as to the likely fate of the aboriginal population, no talk of 'civilising missions', and no faith in the beneficent influence of western civilisation. As the *Speaker* observed:

⁵ *Review of Reviews*, August 1893, pp.120-121.

⁶ *The Times*, 14 October 1893, p.6.

⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 September 1893, p.3.

...whether they perish like the Redmen, slowly and miserably, in some malarial "reservation"...or die out quickly like the Maoris, or become the white man's servants like the Mashonas, their fate in the long run is to be crushed beneath the wheel of civilisation...a considerable breaking of moral eggs seems requisite to the making of these colonial omelettes.⁸

This sense of inevitability did not absolve the Company's supporters from the burden of providing justification for an armed incursion into Matabeleland. By far the most powerful argument was that the Company had been compelled to act in-order to protect the lives and property of its settlers. An expedient ancillary argument was the need to protect the Shona people, the principal victims of Lobengula's raids.

The argument for intervention on humanitarian grounds predominated in the British press. Among its advocates was the popular adventure novelist Henry Rider Haggard, the author of *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). In an interview with the *Central News* agency Haggard identified the 'slaughter' of the Shona as the immediate cause of the crisis, and argued that the Company had been forced to take action in defence of its 'unoffending and gentle' dependents. Anticipating the opposition of humanitarians, Haggard typified the response of the Company's supporters in insisting that the Shona were 'the real aborigines' and that it would be a 'righteous war' to rid the country of the 'Ndebele usurper'.⁹

Haggard's comments were echoed by the explorer J. Theodore Bent who, in a piece for the *Contemporary Review*, stressed the slave owning propensity of the Ndebele as a sure means of securing popular sympathy for the Company's intervention.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, war correspondent and renowned African sympathiser Lady Florence Dixie described Lobengula as 'a usurping despot, whose kingdom is founded on blood, and supported by

⁸ *Speaker*, 2 September 1893, pp.234-235.

⁹ *Standard*, 20 October 1893, p.2.

¹⁰ *Contemporary Review*, November 1893, pp.642-653.

continual blood-letting'. Dixie insisted that the Shona - 'these natives of the soil' - had 'welcomed the Chartered Company and had eagerly placed themselves under its protection'.¹¹ So it was that the eradication of the Ndebele military state was represented not only as an inevitable consequence of the inexorable march of civilisation, but as a humanitarian obligation which no Christian people could ignore.

Moreover, there was the pragmatic contention that if the potential of the Company's territory was to be fully realised, the threat of the war-like Ndebele would have to be eradicated. The massacre of British troops at Isandlwana still loomed large in the collective memory; history could not be permitted to repeat itself in Mashonaland.¹²

IV

A key figure in the Company's conquest of Matabeleland was the new High Commissioner for South Africa, Sir Henry Loch. Unlike his predecessor, Sir Hercules Robinson, Loch was ideologically opposed to Rhodes and his brand of 'privatized' imperialism, favouring instead the expansion of direct imperial rule. While not opposed to the Company's existence, Loch sought to curtail its authority, and redefine its relationship with the Imperial Government.¹³ In return for the imposition of increased supervision and the assumption of related administrative costs, the Company was to be assured of military support from the Imperial Government.

The prospect of war with the Ndebele presented Loch with the opportunity to resume his campaign for the curtailment of the Company's authority, while increasing his own powers over the interior. Loch was anxious to prevent the Company from consolidating its hold over the territory by right of conquest.

¹¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 November 1893, pp.1-2.

¹² *Observer*, 8 October 1893, p.4.

¹³ Glass, Stafford, *Matabele War*, Longmans, London 1968, p.23.

Conversely, Rhodes understood that in the event of war with the Ndebele, the involvement of imperial troops would greatly strengthen the High Commissioner's influence in dictating terms of peace. For this reason Rhodes would seek to achieve a quick and decisive victory which would belong to the Chartered Company alone. The prospective involvement of imperial troops and its implications for the future administration of the Company's territories, succeeded in resurrecting what may be termed the Crown vs. Charter debate in the British press.

By the end of October the Company's forces under Major Patrick Forbes, and an Imperial force under Colonel Hamilton Goold-Adams, were engaged in what the *Daily News* described as 'a race for Bulawayo', each determined to reach Lobengula's capital before the other.¹⁴

On 25 October, the day of the first major military engagement of the war at the Shangani River, *The Times* announced that telegrams received from South Africa indicated Loch's intention to 'supersede' Rhodes in Matabeleland, and that the former 'had taken upon himself the responsibility for the subsequent conduct of affairs, alike civil and military'.¹⁵

News of Loch's intentions split the British press, signifying an ideological divergence concerning the empire's future governance. The Company's staunchest supporters insisted that neither Loch nor Lord Ripon were able to inspire the public, either at home or at the Cape, with the confidence the people had reposed in Rhodes. Having stressed the Imperial Government's record of mismanagement in South Africa, *The Times* declared that news of Loch's intention to 'interfere' had been greeted 'with something like dismay by the public, both in London and in Cape Town'.¹⁶ The *Pall Mall Gazette* expressed similar confidence in Rhodes's mastery of

¹⁴ *Daily News*, 2 November 1893, p.4.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 25 October 1893, p.9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the situation, and contrasted this with the Colonial Office's long tradition 'of incompetence, ignorance, hesitation, and political nervousness'. The journal insisted that 'the feeling of alarm which [had] overspread London...was perfectly natural'.¹⁷

In contrast the Liberal press greeted news of Loch's decision to 'interfere' with considerable relief. Their position was by no means anti-imperial; on the contrary, it represented a clarion call for the Colonial Office to finally assume its responsibilities in South Africa. To give Rhodes an entirely free-hand in Matabeleland would, they feared, be interpreted as an 'abdication' of imperial authority. It was argued that the Chartered Company's inexperienced administration ought to defer to the wise counsels of the Imperial Government, which had been ruling 'savage races' for centuries. Primarily it was hoped that the latter would act as a restraining influence, the 'extermination' of the Ndebele was to be avoided at all costs.¹⁸

The *Manchester Guardian*, while admitting that Loch's announcement had 'provoked resentment in South Africa and criticism in England', rejected the notion - allegedly popularized by the 'Tory press' - that the consensus of British public opinion was that Rhodes be afforded a free hand. On the contrary, the journal doubted whether a single Englishman who had followed the dealings of the Chartered Company with Lobengula entertained such an opinion. Notable exceptions, the journal conceded, were the Stock-exchange 'bulls', who were eagerly awaiting Rhodes's acquisition of Matabeleland in expectation of a rise in the price of Chartered shares. In conclusion, the *Guardian* stated that the Chartered Company had 'shown itself absolutely unfit to be trusted to make terms honourable to this country with any native power whom superior force or astuteness places under its thumb'. Englishmen

¹⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 October 1893, p.2.

¹⁸ *Daily News*, 25 October 1893, p.4.

were encouraged to 'rejoice' that Rhodes would not have everything his own way in the event of a peace settlement with the Ndebele.¹⁹

The Liberal journals were by no means alone in expressing satisfaction at the Imperial Government's planned intervention. The *Saturday Review* advocated that in 'all cases and causes' the Queen must remain supreme over her subjects, while the *Standard* approved of the Crown's decision to assume its rightful role as arbiter. Such a response from the Company's traditional supporters prompted the *Daily Chronicle* to erroneously remark that Loch's intention to intervene had been greeted by a 'unanimous chorus of approval', and that 'even thick-and thin supporters of the Company...[had] hastened to say that the settlement of the Company's quarrel with Lobengula must not lie in the hands of Mr Rhodes'.²⁰

Fortunately for Rhodes his alliance with the Afrikaner Bond would once again pay dividends. Through this alliance Rhodes was able to represent himself and the Company's interests as being in accord with the will of the Cape electorate. Britain could not oppose the Company without alienating her increasingly independent-minded colonists. The Bond's leading organ at the Cape 'rigorously protested' any interference from the Imperial Government in the Company's sphere. The re-publication of such opinions in the British press proved a timely reminder as to the limitations of direct imperial rule.²¹ In an interview with the *Central News* agency Rider Haggard warned his countrymen:

Once we flew in the face of Colonial opinion, and lost America. Do not let us fly in the face of it again and lose South Africa, which may become as wealthy and magnificent as are the United States.²²

¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 October 1893, p.5.

²⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, 2 November 1893, p.4.

²¹ *The Times*, 27 October 1893, p.3.

²² *Standard*, 20 October 1893, p.2.

The controversy was diffused once it became apparent that Loch's intentions had been misrepresented in the press. The cause of the confusion was subsequently traced to the wording of a *Reuters* telegram filed from Cape Town on 24 October. The High Commissioner's modest request that the Imperial Government retain 'a voice in the ultimate settlement' with Lobengula, had been misinterpreted as a desire to supersede the Company's authority in 'Charterland'.²³ *Reuters* clarified the meaning of the telegram the following day but not before the Crown vs. Charter debate had been reignited in both Britain and South Africa.²⁴

V

The Company had assembled a volunteer force of approximately 700 mounted troops - replete with five Maxim guns - and a force of about 400 Mashonas. In lieu of pay each volunteer had accepted an award of gold claims, land in Matabeleland, and a half share of 'loot' to be divided equally with the B.S.A. Company. The Company's forces set out in two columns from Forts Victoria and Charter respectively, rendezvousing on 16 October. The following day the united columns under the command of Major Forbes began their march to Bulawayo. Joining the Company's troops was Loch's imperial force commanded by Colonel Goad-Adams, also advancing on Bulawayo from the south via Tati.²⁵

In the 'race to Bulawayo' Jameson's Company troops won the day. The imperial force had been delayed by a combination of over-cautiousness and Jameson's own intervention in delaying the preparations of Loch's forces. Aside from the occasional skirmish the war consisted of two battles, the first at the Shanghani River on 25 October, and the second at the Mbembesi River on 1 November. On

²³ *The Times*, 27 October 1893, p.3.

²⁴ *Morning Post*, 25 October 1893, p.4.

²⁵ Glass, pp.197-198.

both occasions a superior force of Ndebele, numbering between 3,500 and 6000 warriors respectively, charged the Company's laager only to be repulsed on each occasion by its Maxim guns with heavy loss of life. After the decisive second battle Jameson's force proceeded to Bulawayo and took possession of the capital unopposed. Loch's imperial force arrived a few days later having encountered minor resistance. Despite efforts to recover Lobengula, the King remained elusive, dying of fever in January 1894.

This comprehensive victory was politically advantageous to the Company as it minimized the Imperial Government's scope for interference in its administration. The inevitable consequence of the rout, however, was the offence caused to public sensibilities. As reports of the fighting filtered back to Britain it became clear that the Matabele War had not been a campaign to 'stir the blood'.

At the centre of the controversy was the Company's Maxim machine guns which, when fired from the relative safety of the Company's laager, ensured that the assegai wielding Ndebele rarely came within striking distance of their foes. As the *Daily News* remarked, the Ndebele 'might as well have tried to take a blast furnace by assault'.²⁶ The result in both the principal engagements of the war was a grievous casualty disparity, ensuring that words such as 'slaughter' and 'massacre' would be appended to reports of Rhodes's victory.

Within days Henry Labouchere was seeking confirmation in Parliament that there had been as many as 3,000 Ndebele casualties. His indication that the Company's losses allegedly amounted to two killed, and six wounded, only served to emphasize the disparity. The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sydney Buxton, replied that the latest reports estimated 500 casualties, though he acknowledged this, too, was 'a heavy loss'. The House was brought to order, but only after the Liberal MP, Sir Alpheus

²⁶ *Daily News*, 2 November 1893, p.4.

Morton, had asked Buxton 'whether the Government approve[d] of this murder of 3,000, or even 500 men, for the purpose of plundering and stealing their land?'²⁷

Condemnation of the Company's actions reached its apotheosis in the pages of *Reynolds's Newspaper*, which declared that the 3,000 Ndebele casualties represented a 'Holacust [sic] to the stream of advancing civilization'.²⁸ Even the imperialist journals betrayed a hint of regret at the one-sided nature of the contest. The *Saturday Review* referred to the Battle of Mbembesi as the Company's 'second mowing-match',²⁹ and admitted that it felt 'marvellous little enthusiasm over the wonders which the Maxim gun may do against Matabele, Makalaka, or Mawhatyoulike'.³⁰ The *Pall Mall Gazette's* response reflected the lingering influence of romanticism on the Victorian imagination. In its acknowledgement that modern weapons had replaced the assegai versus bayonet contest of yesteryear, the journal lamented: 'They have half taken the romance out of savage warfare...Victory is victory, however, though it be won after a dull, modern, scientific and unromantic method.'³¹

For the Company's supporters such concerns represented an irrational sentimentality. W.T. Stead's protégé Edmund Garrett, writing in the *National Review*, acknowledged that the Company's great victory - achieved by 'dint of nerve, discipline, knowledge of the country, and an efficient machine gun' - had, in some quarters, been unfairly down-graded. Garrett noted that the hostile editors of Fleet Street had made the Ndebele appear 'as harmless as pheasants before the rifle fire of their relentless butchers'. What exactly was the Company to do Garrett inquired, 'lend the enemy a machine gun or two to equalize matters...'³²

²⁷ HC Deb 3 November 1893, Vol. 18 cc110-1.

²⁸ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 November 1893, p.4.

²⁹ *Saturday Review*, 18 November 1893, p.561.

³⁰ *Ibid*: 23 September 1893, pp.349-350.

³¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 November 1893, p.2.

³² *National Review*, January 1894, pp.681-698. (pp.690-692).

There was also the sense that the short and decisive campaign, though costly in human life, would ultimately serve a philanthropic purpose. It would prove a recurring theme in the British press, the belief that military intervention was a necessary prerequisite to the advancement of civilization. The *Pall Mall Gazette* may have conceded that the Company's Maxim's had caused 'terrible slaughter'; however, this had been accompanied by the expectation that this would 'prove to have been in the best interests of humanity'.³³

The Government of the day did not treat the accusations of gratuitous murder with any great seriousness. When Labouchere raised the issue again on 9 November, Buxton challenged him to produce 'one tittle of evidence to show that there was one man killed in these battles beyond what was necessary to ensure the victory of the troops'. In addressing Labouchere directly, the Under Secretary remarked:

I would ask my hon. Friend for occasional friendly judgement in these matters, and not always to assume with regard to his countrymen that the worst side of the human character is the true one.³⁴

VI

The missionaries of Zambesia, notwithstanding their denominational differences, were alike both in their failure to attract converts, and in their general opposition to the unreformed continuance of Lobengula's rule. This is not to imply that the societies were necessarily resolute supporters of the Chartered Company, on the contrary, men such as Rev. Ralph Wardlaw Thompson, secretary of the LMS, had repeatedly highlighted the inaptness of a Company possessing both commercial and administrative powers. As a

³³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 November 1893, p.2.

³⁴ HC Deb 9 November 1893, Vol. 18 cc543-627.

'Christian Imperialist' Thompson's preference was for direct imperial rule, however, in the absence of this preferred alternative, both he, and a majority of missionaries, chose to align themselves with the Chartered Company rather than suffer the missions to drag out a futile existence in Matabeleland.

At the forefront of the missionary campaign for intervention were the tyrannized Shona people – Lobengula's vassals. In August 1893 Dr William Alexander, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, filed a letter to *The Times* from Cape Town, in which he denounced the Ndebele as murderers, cannibals, and enslavers. The destruction of their military power, the Bishop maintained, was a prerequisite to the opening up of the country 'to civilization, to commerce and to Christianity'.³⁵

Rev. A.M. Hartman of the Society of Jesus Roman Catholic Mission in Mashonaland concurred, declaring that 'The tender feelings of mercy, sympathy, and compassion have no room in the heart of the Matabele.' Hartman's reports, which were to surface in the British press during September 1893, were a litany of cruelty and oppression, of burning villages and emaciated slaves. If such atrocities were permitted to continue, Hartman warned, the Shona would face extinction, and as if in recognition of the factional appeal of this argument, Hartman proceeded to remind his readers that it was upon Shona labour that the development of the country depended.³⁶

Also in September, the Rev. A.D. Sylvester, the English chaplain at Fort Victoria, published an account of the July raid. Having described the scene of devastation wrought by the Ndebele impis, of a terrified and harassed European population imprisoned within its own fort, and of the mutilated corpses of their Shona servants littering the surrounding districts, Sylvester concluded:

³⁵ *The Times*, 29 August 1893, p.10.

³⁶ *Ibid*: 7 September 1893, p.3.

Surely the time has come when the Matabele power should be destroyed and civilization should take the place of barbarism, for no Christian people can simply fold their hands and allow hundreds of their fellow-creatures to be murdered wholesale...the Matabele question must be settled for once and for ever.³⁷

The second component of this interventionist campaign consisted of optimistic accounts of Shona progress under the auspices of the Chartered Company, including their readiness for conversion to Christianity. The published letters of the Rev. Isaac Shimmin, superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission in Mashonaland, spoke of how the Shona had responded enthusiastically to their religious lessons, and how they had allegedly requested that 'teachers' be left at their villages to instruct them in the gospel. Meanwhile, a Mr Fred MacDonald of the Wesleyan Mission-house in London told *The Times* that 'Christian missionaries have seldom been brought into contact with gentler savages, or with heathen more accessible to the influence of the gospel.'³⁸

It would have been difficult for the readers of such reports to escape the implication that the Ndebele represented the principal stumbling block to the pacification, civilization, and Christianization of the tribes within the Company's sphere. If only the Ndebele threat could be removed, the Chartered Company would be at liberty to deal with a docile and Christianized population eager to conform to the expectations of their European neighbours.

In November 1893 Rev. Thompson explained to the *Daily Chronicle* the extent to which the prospect of military intervention against the Ndebele had posed a moral dilemma for the missionary fraternity. Military action was a useful expedient to facilitate the removal of an intractable problem, but could it be morally justified? On the one hand there was the desire to protect the Ndebele, to work with them and exert some positive influence. On the other, there was

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid: 2 September 1893, p.3.

the gradual realization that such was their obstinacy that they would never submit to reform of their own volition.

Thompson spoke favourably of the Ndebele, believing them 'as capable of development as any uncivilized race'; however, in light of his visit to Matabeleland ten years earlier, he had concluded 'that their government was a barrier to progress'. He explained that for thirty years the LMS had maintained a Mission in Matabeleland, and that in spite of this presence, on account of 'the fear in which the people live', the visible results had been 'almost nil'. The patience of a significant number of missionaries had run out. Of the Ndebele, Thompson declared: 'I never came across any tribe whose manner of life and mode of dealing with their neighbours, excited such universal indignation and dislike even among peace-loving and native-loving men.'³⁹

The belief that the missionary lobby had - for the most part - sided with the Chartered Company, was widely propagated in Britain, and was a belief held, Thompson conceded, 'with good reason'. Rhodes himself acknowledged the support he had received from the missionary community, informing a Cape Town audience after the war that he had received 'the unanimous support of the religious denominations in Mashonaland - religious denominations representing the Church of England, the Roman Catholics, the Wesleyans... [and] the Salvation Army...'⁴⁰

Rev. Thompson spoke no less than the truth when he conceded that the 'belligerent' attitude of certain representatives of the missionary lobby had garnered considerable criticism in Britain.⁴¹ The *Manchester Guardian* remarked that one of the most 'revolting' aspects of the crisis had been the spectacle of 'the whole or nearly the whole missionary interest' calling for the Ndebele to be 'driven

³⁹ *Daily Chronicle*, 16 November 1893, p.5.

⁴⁰ Vindex, speech at the Good Hope Hall, Cape Town, 6 January 1894, pp.335-360 (p.347).

⁴¹ *Daily Chronicle*, 16 November 1893, p.5.

wholesale across the Zambesi'.⁴² Similarly, the *Daily Chronicle* accused the LMS of having abandoned the methods of Jesus Christ, and of advocating the 'intervention of the fleshly arm' to first break and then reform the Ndebele people.⁴³

The attitude of the missionary fraternity serves to highlight the contemporary willingness to employ military force as an instrument of civilization, and to accelerate a process apparently both divinely inspired and inevitable.

It is clear, however, that Rhodes's Chartered Company was considered, in many ways, to be a necessary evil, rather than a preferred instrument of imperial rule. In this regard Thompson was unequivocal, his proposal was not to entrust the African tribes to the care of the Chartered Company – 'whose control necessarily must be largely affected by considerations of self-interest, and of the accounts which must sooner or later be rendered to their shareholders' - but rather 'that Her Majesty's Government [should] insist upon having the country brought under imperial rule...'⁴⁴

The preference for direct imperial rule marked the intersection between missionary and humanitarian opinion in regard to the Matabele War. The APS had remained largely silent until the cessation of hostilities, a position subsequently defended by the Society's secretary, Henry Fox Bourne, on the grounds that representations made in the midst of conflict would have been futile. It may also have reflected a divergence of attitudes among members as to the desirability of intervention. Bourne would later insist that the APS opposed the 'methods pursued in the conquest of Matabeleland'.⁴⁵

⁴² *Manchester Guardian*, 27 October 1893, p.5.

⁴³ *Daily Chronicle*, 18 November 1893, p.4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 16 November 1893, p.5.

⁴⁵ Bourne, Henry Richard Fox, *The Aborigines' Protection Society: Chapters in its History*, P.S. King and Son, London 1899, p.46.

On 4 November 1893 Bourne expounded the APS's position in a letter to Lord Ripon. The Matabele War, he argued, had vindicated those who had prophesied the inevitability of conflict between the Company and its neighbours. Bourne condemned the Company's methods and urged Ripon to belatedly assert the supremacy of the Imperial Government in the settlement of Matabeleland.⁴⁶

The APS did not limit itself to paper protests. On 14 December 1893, a deputation of Society members and other interested parties were received by Lord Ripon at the Colonial Office. The deputation was large, perhaps forty members, and included both Bourne, and Thompson of the LMS. The memorial which accompanied the deputation detailed the various clauses which could be used to more effectively control the Company in future, or perhaps more accurately, to supplant its administration. The memorial was at pains to stress that conquest alone did not give Rhodes's Company automatic rights to the territory, nor for that matter did either the Rudd or Lippert Concessions.

Ripon advised the deputation that it was unlikely that Zambesia would become a Crown Colony. Once again, direct support for the Chartered Company was absent. On the contrary, Ripon expressed sympathy with the deputation's opposition to Company rule. As further evidence of the changing relationship between Britain and her colonies, the Colonial Secretary explained that the will of the South African people could not be ignored; their preference appeared to be for Rhodes, and not for the extension of direct imperial rule. In an effort to placate the deputation Ripon insisted that the Imperial Government would retain ultimate authority over the Company's territory, and would do all in its power to protect the welfare of all peoples living in the country.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Published throughout the British press on 4 November 1893; also *Aborigines' Friend*, January 1894, p.385.

⁴⁷ *Aborigines' Friend*, January 1894, pp.385-394.

The subtle distinction in attitudes between the missionary and humanitarian societies can largely be explained by considering the proximity of these groups to the Africans themselves. The Missionaries who lived alongside the Ndebele - as in the shadow of a live volcano - stood daily witness to the cruelties they practiced upon the neighbouring Shona. The metropolitan members of the APS in contrast, were removed from the danger – their critics would say, removed from reality. As James Heartfield has demonstrated, APS members were lampooned throughout the nineteenth century for failing to match their concern for aborigines abroad with the suffering masses at home. Among other cultural references Heartfield quoted the wag's definition of a philanthropist from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* as 'a man whose charity increases directly as the square of the distance'.⁴⁸

It must also be acknowledged that the propagation of Christianity was not the APS's primary objective. The Society's stated mission was 'to assist in protecting the defenceless and promoting the advancement of uncivilised tribes'.⁴⁹ By the 1890s this meant the advocacy of direct imperial rule in Britain's African territories as the most effective means of safeguarding African interests, a position derived from the recommendations of the *Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes* (1837).⁵⁰ For the missionaries, on the other hand, the propagation of the gospel remained their principal objective; the administration of Rhodes's Chartered Company may have been less than ideal, however, it provided a stable framework within which Christian missions might flourish, and for most this was preferable to the recalcitrant rule of Lobengula.

⁴⁸ Heartfield, pp.57–60; also *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, Ch. 38.

⁴⁹ Bourne, p.9.

⁵⁰ *Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes*, William Ball, London 1837, pp.117-118.

VII

A contributor to the *National Review* wrote of the Matabele War: 'The broad political view of this South African imbroglio affords, even for the expert, such a puzzling field that the average British elector may well hesitate to express a definite opinion on the subject.'⁵¹ A similar ambiguity was evident in the British public's attitude to Rhodes personally, as W.T. Stead explained:

He is represented on the one side as the very embodiment of commercial unscrupulousness, only eager to extend the domain, or bolster up the fortunes, or avert the exposure, of the British South Africa Company...On the other side, he is glorified as the great Imperial genius, the one able man in South Africa whom the nation can trust, the apostle of civilization, and the patron of Christian missions, who is engaged in executing long delayed justice on a murderous and treacherous people.⁵²

Which was the view most popularly held? Stead concluded with Greswell, that 'The great mass of people...in the absence of the requisite information prefer[red] to pass no extreme judgements.' Stead conceded, however, that not all 'home staying Englishmen' were convinced of the necessity of marching on Lobengula's kraal.⁵³ According to the *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent at Johannesburg, however, the prelude to war had witnessed something of a sea-change in British attitudes. The correspondent attributed the change to Rhodes's manipulation of the press, both in London and in South Africa, and marveled at how the British public had been moved from a position of 'critical disapproval' to one of 'enthusiastic encouragement'.⁵⁴

By the end of November 1893, the Duke of Fife, speaking at the Chartered Company's AGM in London, felt suitably assured to declare that the Company's 'only critics' were the 'Little England party'. Fife on this occasion described Rhodes's supporters in Britain

⁵¹ *National Review*, November 1893, pp.394-399, (p.398).

⁵² *Review of Reviews*, November 1893, pp.470-471.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 17 November 1893, p.8.

as 'realists', who understood that only the Chartered Company had the financial resolve to defend British interests in South Africa, and knew that if the Chartered Company withdrew, the territory would be lost to a rival Power, an outcome which would favour neither the Empire nor the Africans, whom its opponents professed to care so much about.⁵⁵

In terms of political support, Rhodes's most zealous champions in the House belonged to the Conservative Opposition. It marked a significant thawing in the relationship between the Unionist Party and Rhodes, whose politics – particularly his support for Irish Home Rule – had earmarked him as a man of questionable loyalties. The *Liberal Daily News* was surprised by the apparent about-face, did Rhodes's politics not make him in their eyes 'a traitor, the ally of rebels, the friend of men condemned by the Parnell Commission, a determined foe to the unity of the Empire and the integrity of the United Kingdom?' The man who had once been the subject of considerable mistrust in Britain, particularly - though somewhat ironically - among advocates of imperial unity, had progressively acquired their trust. The journal noted that Rhodes's 'new patrons' now zealously adored what they formerly [had] burnt'.⁵⁶

The same period witnessed a corresponding increase in attacks made against Rhodes by Liberals, and by Radicals in particular. The expressions of goodwill from across the political spectrum which had greeted the creation of the Chartered Company had given way, in certain quarters, to cynicism.

Similarly, the more Rhodes was championed as the great imperial benefactor, the more his opponents were inclined to cast aspersions as to his loyalties. The *Daily Chronicle* demanded to know: 'what are the "parties" that Mr Rhodes, the English patriot, is working

⁵⁵ *Morning Post*, 21 November 1893, p.6.

⁵⁶ *Daily News*, 20 November 1893, p.4.

for...Parnellism in Ireland, the Afrikander Bund [sic] in South Africa'.⁵⁷ The following day the journal warned its readers: 'Mr Rhodes is no friend of the British Empire. He has allied himself with its bitterest enemies, and his politics are fully as dangerous as is his finance.'⁵⁸

A contributing factor to this increasing Liberal hostility to Rhodes was the astonishing growth of his personal power. The Prime Minister of the Cape Colony was now the de facto ruler of a united country soon to be renamed Rhodesia, his influence extending from the Cape to the Zambezi River and beyond.⁵⁹ To his opponents Rhodes was increasingly represented as a 'scheming, and interested despot', who had rendered the High Commissioner 'a puppet in his hands'. Even supporters such as W.T. Stead referred to Rhodes admiringly as 'the Dictator', while the *Saturday Review* likened his multi-faceted powers to those of Cerberus and Geryon - three-headed monsters from Greek mythology - concluding, 'it is not a wholesome state of affairs'.⁶⁰

'Charterland' was not infrequently represented as a clandestine tyranny, an aberration of the Empire's proud tradition of diffusing political and economic liberty. Armed with dictatorial powers and accountable only to its shareholders, the Company was allegedly free to coerce the local population in the service of its own interests. If opponents considered the Company's territory a dictatorship, it was perhaps unsurprising that they should identify Rhodes as its dictator. The *Speaker*, which had described 'Charterland' as 'a sort of Russian autocracy', described Rhodes as 'a species of Czar whose ukase is the law'.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Daily Chronicle*, 1 November 1893, p.4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 2 November 1893, p.4.

⁵⁹ The name Rhodesia had been informally adopted by settlers since the country's occupation in 1890. The name was popularly used in Britain from 1894, though it would not be adopted officially by the Imperial Government until 1898.

⁶⁰ *Saturday Review*, 13 January 1893, p.35.

⁶¹ *Speaker*, 28 October 1893, pp.456-457.

If this concentration of power provoked great anxiety, it also inspired great hope. Rhodes's political alliance with the Afrikaner Bond, in addition to his creation of a new imperial province in the north to counter the influence of the Dutch Republics, suggested that Rhodes was uniquely placed to affect the union of South Africa under British auspices. The Irish nationalist James Hogan articulated this sentiment in the House of Commons when he suggested that Rhodes, 'a statesman of such strong fibre, such commanding personality, such unswerving determination, and such far-seeing sagacity', was engaged in 'the truly loyal and noble mission' of building a British Confederation in South Africa which would in future take its place alongside Canada, and the soon to be consummated dominion of Australia.⁶²

VIII

Perhaps the most significant impact of the Matabele War in Britain was that it served to focus attention on the increasingly irregular makeup of the British Empire. 'Public opinion', the *Observer* explained, 'suddenly finds itself amazed and slightly alarmed at the tangle of self-governing colonies, protectorates, and chartered companies which go to make up the total of British possessions south of the Zambesi.'⁶³ The war had challenged politicians and commentators of all political persuasions to consider the changing face of the British Empire, both in terms of its rapid expansion, its administrative structure, and in regard to the changing relationship between the colonies and the mother country.

The haphazard expansion of the Empire had unquestionably led to the 'patch[ing] up' of existing systems, yet there was evidence to suggest that this 'lack of symmetry' had endowed British imperialism

⁶² HC Deb 9 November 1893 Vol. 18 cc543-627.

⁶³ *Observer*, 5 November 1893, p.4.

with a certain 'vitality', of which Rhodes himself was a product.⁶⁴ There was recognition, too, that the same enterprising spirit which animated Rhodes had inspired the Elizabethan privateers to lay the foundations of the British Empire.

It must be acknowledged, however, that to many this was a retrograde development. The *Daily Chronicle*, when 'invited to rank Mr Rhodes with Drake and Clive and the rest...' drew the distinction – 'Other times, other manners', and argued that the 'buccaneering of Amalgamator Rhodes' was inappropriate 'in these days of clearer moral light...'⁶⁵

Critics insisted that there were drawbacks to this 'happy-go-lucky system'; if men such as Rhodes represented the vigour and vitality of the Empire, they also posed a threat to its stability. The loss of centralized control and the increasing autonomy of the Empire's various parts meant that, in the *Observer's* expression, 'the colonial tail ha[d] often wagged the imperial head'. It also made it increasingly difficult for the Imperial Government to form a coherent policy towards the Empire, a criticism repeatedly leveled against both Conservative and Liberal administrations in regard to South Africa. A further concern, of whom Rhodes was the archetypal example, was that the present system created an environment in which 'one strong man or combination', could attain power in a distant corner of the Empire, and as the *Observer* explained, thereby:

...direct the policy of Great Britain in any particular part of the world to such an extent that the Imperial Government finds itself committed to enterprises for which it has no special liking, and involved in quarrels which are none of its seeking.⁶⁶

In this connection Rhodes's occupation of multiple roles simultaneously was cause for particular concern. The *Observer*

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Daily Chronicle*, 25 November 1893, p.4.

⁶⁶ *Observer*, 5 November 1893, p.4.

concluded that it was a farcical arrangement, more suited 'to the stage of the Savoy than to South Africa'.⁶⁷

It was the Imperial Government's inability to exercise 'any real control over such "machine-gun" politicians as Mr Rhodes', that led the prominent Nonconformist minister and author J. Hirst Hollowell to argue that the time had come to cease adding to the area of the Empire, and instead focus on the development of those countries already 'under our flag'.⁶⁸ The *Daily Chronicle* had articulated this belief in the immediate aftermath of the Matabele War when it remarked:

For ourselves we certainly regard the extension of our military frontier as a source of weakness rather than of strength, and we measure greatness, not by the square miles, but by righteousness that exalteth a nation.⁶⁹

Rhodes had alerted the political class in Britain to the fact that events were progressing within the Empire which were largely beyond its control. It had taken a man of Rhodes's 'strength of will' and 'decided views' to focus the attention of British commentators on the fact that the dynamism of imperial expansion now lay, not in London, but in colonial capitals throughout the Empire. The emergence of 'one strong man' as the undisputed power in Southern Africa afforded an opportunity to the Imperial Government, just as it provided cause for concern. The challenge for British politicians would be to utilize Rhodes's abilities, to harness his influence in South Africa - particularly among the Cape Afrikaners - exploit his knowledge, and thereby strengthen the imperial position.⁷⁰

A week later the *Observer* was similarly perceptive in explaining that the Matabele War and Rhodes's 'privatization' of imperialism had highlighted the increasing powerlessness of the Imperial Government to intervene directly in the affairs of its colonies. 'In fact, if not in

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1893, p.6.

⁶⁹ *Daily Chronicle*, 25 November 1893, p.4.

⁷⁰ *Observer*, 5 November 1893, p.4.

name', the journal declared, 'we have conceded autonomy to our South African colonies.' This had been made abundantly clear by the fact that 'the South African Government and Mr Cecil Rhodes [had become] synonymous terms'.⁷¹

Rhodes's relationship with the Bond typified the opposing sentiments of hope and concern. If Rhodes's conciliation of the Afrikaner's could pave the way to imperial federation, his manipulation of their support could lead to an increasingly independent South Africa with Rhodes installed as its President. The *Daily News* called the emerging policy 'Home Rule with a vengeance', and by the end of November 1893 had accepted that Britain's ability to interfere in the settlement of Matabeleland would be minimal, and that no amount of 'hand wringing' in Parliament or the Press would make any difference:

Her Majesty's Government are bound to provide so far as they can for the safety and the welfare of Matabele and Mashonas. Their powers, however, are strictly limited by distance, by the Charter, and by the public opinion of the Cape.⁷²

The *Daily Chronicle* was more forthright, inferring that Rhodes was blackmailing the Imperial Government into acquiescing to his demands. Failure to do so, the *Chronicle* warned, would see 'the dictator of South Africa...fling a secessionist republic at our heads'.⁷³

The danger posed by this changing relationship was exemplified by two speeches Rhodes had given following the conquest of Matabeleland. Addressing the Company's victorious forces at Bulawayo in December 1893, Rhodes complained that they had been labeled 'freebooting marauders' and 'bloodthirsty murderers'. Rhodes was indignant: 'We ask for nothing, for neither men nor

⁷¹ Ibid: 12 November 1893, p.4.

⁷² *Daily News*, 20 November 1893, p.4.

⁷³ *Daily Chronicle*, 7 November 1893, p.4.

money, and still a certain portion vilify us. In the same spirit it was that the mother-country lost America.⁷⁴

At Cape Town Rhodes reminded his audience that the world was changing, that protective tariffs were locking out British commerce all over the world, only serving to heighten the importance of the colonies to the mother country. It was Rhodes's insinuation that the colonies might look elsewhere for trading alliances if the Imperial Government proved uncooperative which caused the greatest controversy at home.

Once again, the cause of this public indignation can be traced to the wording of a *Reuters* telegram filed at Cape Town on 7 January 1894.⁷⁵ Rhodes's reminder to Britain of her responsibilities to her colonies had been lost in translation, and replaced by the frank announcement that if the Crown did not recognize its duties to the colonies, the latter 'might look elsewhere'. Rhodes's mission was ennobled by his commitment to the British Empire and the resulting expansion of civilization in the interests of humanity. Stripped of such ideals he assumed the appearance of a selfish financier, only willing to tolerate the imperial connection to the extent that it served his political and economic interests. In response to the erroneous quotation the *Daily News* concluded:

He [Rhodes] is extremely loyal to the mother country, so long as he can get from the mother country exactly what he wants. When, if ever, that time comes to an end, a Dutch-African Republic would apparently be his alternative. Mr Rhodes's ability and strength of character are unquestionable. His patriotism seems to be largely dependent upon his self-interest.⁷⁶

The reaction of *Reynolds's Newspaper* to the speech was to feign sympathy for Rhodes's supporters in Britain, suggesting that they

⁷⁴ Vindex, speech at Bulawayo, 19 December 1893, pp.328-335 (pp.329-330).

⁷⁵ The controversial *Reuters'* telegram of 7 January 1894 was widely circulated throughout the British press; for the original text see: *Daily News*, 8 January 1894, p.5.

⁷⁶ *Daily News*, 8 January 1894, p.5.

had been duped by Rhodes into supporting his schemes, only to be promptly jettisoned when he had no further need of them. The journal claimed to have known all along that Rhodes was 'playing for his own hand', and far from entertaining ambitions of imperial unity, affirmed that 'his dream was really the foundation of a Dutch-African Republic with himself as President, and that he did not care a row of pins about the Empire or its rulers'. Referring to Rhodes sardonically as 'the South African dictator', the journal interpreted the misquoted statement to mean: 'Let us get the swag...or we shall kick the Queen's crown into the Zambesi.'⁷⁷

By the end of January most of these fears had been allayed, as more accurate reports of Rhodes's 'Victory speech' reached Britain. The *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent admitted that the intentions of the Cape Premier had been taken out of context and that undue significance had been attached to certain portions of his speech.⁷⁸ The *Observer* also concluded:

Mr Rhodes is an imperialist, and if he has lent all his energies to the acquisition of as much of the southern part of the African continent for Great Britain as was to be had, he has done it that the British Empire might be the greater and not the smaller for his action.⁷⁹

In spite of the retraction it was inevitable that a residual impression of Rhodes's alleged duplicity would be left behind, as had been the case in his dealings with Bechuanaland and in his donation to Parnell. The seed of doubt had been planted and would find its place in the Rhodes myth.

IX

The future administration of Matabeleland had been a forgone conclusion since mid-November 1893. The failure of Imperial forces

⁷⁷ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 14 January 1894, p.4.

⁷⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1894, p.5.

⁷⁹ *Observer*, 28 January 1894, p.4.

under the direction of Sir Henry Loch to play any significant part in the fighting, or to reach Bulawayo before Jameson's men, had effectively delivered the country into the hands of the Chartered Company. Legal obligations pertaining to the Company's charter, combined with the strength of both public and political opinion at the Cape in favour of Rhodes being given a free hand, gave the Imperial Government little room for maneuver. Matabeleland was brought under the aegis of Rhodes's Chartered Company, the Imperial Government being content to affect a moderate increase in its supervisory powers.⁸⁰

The Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sydney Buxton, outlined the Government's position to the House of Commons on 15 March 1894. The official view was that the war had been 'very unwelcome and unexpected' to the Chartered Company. Buxton was convinced that it had only sought to develop Mashonaland and realize its potential before extending operations into Matabeleland. As for the prosecution of the war, Buxton claimed to have acquired 'every possible scrap of information' on the subject, and found that the war had been conducted with 'humanity and propriety'. He further admitted that in any war there were occasional and isolated abuses. No war, Buxton claimed, 'would probably bear a microscopical examination'.⁸¹

In bestowing the administration of Matabeleland upon the Chartered Company, Buxton explained that the concessions granted by Lobengula - and never entirely repudiated by him - had been approved by the last Conservative administration. Consequently, it would be impossible to remove the charter, even if the Imperial Government wished to do so. In choosing between the establishment of a Crown Colony on the one hand, and administration by the Company on the other, Buxton admitted that 'there really was no

⁸⁰ For details of the Chartered Company's new administrative structure in Rhodesia see Glass pp.267-268; also C.7383, South Africa: Papers relating to the Administration of Matabeleland and Mashonaland, May 1894, pp.11-15.

⁸¹ HC Deb 15 March 1894 Vol. 22, cc391-429.

alternative' to the use of the Company; not least because the charter included both Mashonaland and Matabeleland, and the intention had always been that at some future date the Company would administer both territories.

Labouchere's objection was defeated by a clear majority, 38 Members siding with the member for Northampton, 145 voting in support of the settlement. If the assertion of the Liberal MP Sir William Byles was correct - that approval would be tantamount to the Committee having justified the war - Rhodes's supporters represented the clear majority. The Conservative MP Sir Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett affirmed this view when he declared that the great mass of the people were grateful to Rhodes, and to his Company.⁸²

Political opponents of the Chartered Company constituted a vociferous minority, as the aforementioned figures demonstrate. In positing an explanation for this the Irish nationalist MP Vesey Knox believed that a liberal distribution of Company shares to politicians on both sides of the House had succeeded in silencing all but the most principled Members.⁸³ A subsequent investigation by the *Daily Chronicle* into the identities of Chartered Company shareholders lent credence to this theory. The investigation unearthed a significant number of MPs and other men of influence on the Company's lists, including - somewhat incongruously from a political standpoint - the Radical MP, Charles Conybeare, who had been a vocal defender of the Company's position in Parliament. Less surprising was the appearance of Rochfort Maguire's name. As a member of the Rudd delegation, Maguire had been rewarded with a large number of Company shares, most of which he had apparently sold by December 1893. According to the *Chronicle* he retained a little over

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Daily News*, 15 December 1893, p.3.

one thousand shares and had proven himself to be one of the Company's most skillful apologists in Parliament.⁸⁴

In August 1894 the House of Commons investigation into the Ndebele raid on Fort Victoria vindicated the Company on all major counts; however, the author of the report, F.J. Newton, did conclude that in the skirmish immediately following the raid, the Company's troops had fired first. With this exception the Company's response was adjudged to have been just and humane.⁸⁵ Rhodes had achieved his objectives in Matabeleland; he had been vindicated by the Imperial Government, and had secured the balance of popular support in both Britain and the Cape Colony.

⁸⁴ *Daily Chronicle*, 29 December 1893, p.4.

⁸⁵ C7555, Report by Mr F.J. Newton, CMG, Upon the Circumstances connected with the Collision between the Matabele and the Forces of the B.S.A. Company at Fort Victoria in July 1893, and the correspondence connected therewith (23 August 1894).

Chapter 5

'If you can make one heap of all your winnings/

And risk it on one turn of pitch and toss.'

In the winter of 1894-1895 Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, guiding spirit of the British South Africa Company, and conqueror of Matabeleland, made a triumphant return to the country of his birth. It began upon his arrival at Plymouth, where he was eulogistically praised by the Mayor of that town in recognition of his recent services to the Empire. In reply Rhodes had churlishly declared that such support would have been welcome during the late war when his men had been branded 'murderers and thieves'. He was able to note with satisfaction, however, that such attitudes had now changed and that public opinion had evidently swung in his favour.¹

Rhodes's public appearances that winter solidified his reputation as the Empire's pre-eminent Colonial statesman. He dined at Windsor Castle with Queen Victoria, he was hailed as the great hero of Empire during a mass meeting at the Imperial Institute, with the Prince of Wales occupying the chair; and he received a rapturous reception from the shareholders of the Chartered Company at their annual meeting in London.

The greatest honour afforded Rhodes came at the end of his visit to Britain when, in the presence of Queen Victoria and the Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, he was sworn in as a member of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council. The *Pall Mall Gazette* felt sure that this decision would meet with popular approval,² while the *Morning Post* considered it an appropriate honour for the man who,

¹ *The Times*, 17 November 1894, p.9.

² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 January 1895, p.8.

perhaps more than any other in colonial history, had so completely dedicated himself to the service of the Empire.³

Remarking upon the rise of Rhodes's reputation, the *Daily News* argued that 'The successful conclusion of the Matabele War, and the general feeling that on the whole the speedy result [had been] beneficial alike to victor and vanquished, ha[d] aided greatly in disarming opposition at home to the Company's policy.'⁴

Tact and diplomacy were terms used frequently that winter to explain Rhodes's success in slowly bringing to fruition his dream of a federated South Africa under Imperial auspices. In Britain he had received the backing of the two political parties of the state, and his practical method of dealing with difficult situations had met with general approval. Perhaps most significantly Rhodes, by his example, had inspired the British people with a new vision for the Empire. Commenting upon this rising national sentiment on the occasion of Rhodes's visit to Paris, the French newspaper *Le Temps* declared: 'English Africa is no longer the mere dream of a few enthusiasts.'⁵

Rhodes left Britain at the zenith of his power and influence. When he returned a year later it was to 'face the music' for the part he had played in a conspiracy to overthrow the government of the Transvaal Republic.

II

In considering the Jameson Raid, it is necessary to ask what transpired in the months immediately prior to the attack on the Transvaal to compel Rhodes and his fellow conspirators to abandon

³ *Morning Post*, 3 January 1895, p.3.

⁴ *Daily News*, 19 January 1895, p.5.

⁵ Views of *Le Temps* quoted in *The Times*, 3 December 1894, p.5.

their hitherto unwearied policy of conciliation, and replace it with one of coercion.

The Transvaal President, Paul Kruger, had long embodied the greatest threat to Rhodes's dream of a South African federation under the British flag. For many years Kruger had obstinately rejected all attempts to facilitate closer relations between the states by the adoption of a common railway and customs union. His antipathy towards the Empire was not in itself a new development, however, by the mid-1890s there were signs that the balance of power in South Africa was beginning to shift in the Transvaal's favour.

The gold mines of the Rand had rendered the Transvaal the most powerful state in South Africa. By late-1894 it was clear that there would be no repetition in Rhodesia. The Transvaal had finally acquired a railway to Delagoa Bay, thus diverting the valuable trade with the Rand away from colonial railways and ports. The Transvaal's capacity for drawing other states into its economic orbit had already been demonstrated by the decision of Natal - a British colony - to place 'advantage before sentiment', and enter into a railway and customs union with the Transvaal.⁶

Rhodes's ill-fated meeting with Kruger in October 1894 had evinced the latter's intention to frustrate Rhodes's ambitions and the futility of further diplomacy. Kruger's increasing hostility towards the Cape culminated in the so-called Drifts Crisis of October 1895.⁷ Conflict with the Transvaal held out the prospect of regime change and the possibility of an administration which would both acquiesce

⁶ Van der Poel, Jean, *The Jameson Raid*, Oxford University Press 1951, p3; also Van der Poel, Jean, *Railway and Customs Policies in South Africa: 1885-1910*, Royal Empire Society: Imperial Studies, No. 8. 1933, pp.72-81.

⁷ The Drift's Crisis, October 1895: Kruger's administration determined to push the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State out of the Transvaal market by placing prohibitively high tariffs on goods coming into the Rand. British traders retaliated by unloading their trucks at the Vaal River before crossing the Drifts (fords) with their merchandise packed into ox waggons. Kruger ordered the Drifts to be closed on 1 October in contravention of the London Convention (1884). Under pressure from London Kruger reopened the drifts on 7 November and conflict was temporarily averted.

in the federation of the South African states and institute reforms favourable to business. The peaceful resolution of the Drifts Crisis had caused Chartered Company shares to tumble.

Explanations for the Raid fall into two principal categories, the political and the economic.⁸ The economic argument stresses that Kruger's Government was bad for business, and that its overthrow would usher in a new era of co-operation and efficiency. This argument asserts that the increased costs of mining necessities, in conjunction with inefficient labour regulations, had produced a deleterious effect on the mining industry.

The second contributory factor stemmed from Kruger's decision to deny the franchise to the Uitlanders, the Transvaal's ex-patriot mining community, who increasingly outnumbered Kruger's burghers. This policy of taxation without representation was a key factor in both the consolidation of grievances and in the instigation of a reform committee to challenge this alleged discrimination.

Under Rhodes's influence the campaign for the franchise and other civic rights for the Uitlanders became the 'stalking horse' of the conspiracy. Through his control of the reform committee Rhodes sought to instigate a revolution at Johannesburg and to ensure that it retained a distinctly British character. In Britain there was cross-party support for the removal of the Kruger administration and the re-absorption of the Transvaal into the imperial sphere. There was

⁸ See Blainey, G.A. 'Lost Causes of the Jameson Raid', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Vol. 18 No. 2, 1965, pp.350-366; Buxton, E., 'The Jameson Raid', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 30, No. 119, April 1931, pp.113-118; Drus, E., 'The Question of Imperial Complicity in the Jameson Raid', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 68 No. 269, October 1953, published by Oxford University Press, pp.582-593; Galbraith, J.S., 'The British South Africa Company and the Jameson Raid', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 1, November 1970, Cambridge University Press on behalf of the North American Conference on British Studies, pp.145-161; Ireland, A., 'The True Story of the Jameson Raid as related to me by John Hays Hammond II', *The North American Review*, Vol. 208 No. 754, September 1918, pp.365-376; Mendehlson, R., 'Blainey and the Jameson Raid: The Debate Renewed', *Journal of Southern African Studies* Vol. 6 No. 2, April 1980, pp.157-170; Walker, E.A., 'The Jameson Raid', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Cambridge University Press, Vol.6 No.3, January 1940, pp.283-306; Winkler, H.R., 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Jameson Raid', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 54 No. 4, July 1949, pp.841-849.

widespread recognition that its independence was the result of policy errors made during Gladstone's second ministry, and that the Transvaal's continuing autonomy was not only an impediment to South African federation, but a direct threat to British hegemony.

III

While inciting disaffection and unrest at Johannesburg, Rhodes sought to take practical steps to ensure that when the uprising occurred, Chartered Company troops would be in a position to determine the direction of the revolution. To achieve this he required a 'jumping off ground' close to the Transvaal border from whence a force could be despatched, ostensibly to secure order, but in reality to secure the success of the uprising and ensure it retained a British character. The late Liberal ministry had previously assured Rhodes that in time British Bechuanaland would be transferred to the Cape, and that the Bechuanaland Protectorate would be transferred to the Company. When the Unionists returned to power Rhodes insisted that this promise be fulfilled, and despatched his secretary, Dr Rutherford Harris, to negotiate with Chamberlain.⁹

The pretext for the transfer of territory was the extension of the railway northward from Mafeking to Bulawayo. In addition, Rhodes requested that he be permitted to bring the Chartered Company's police from Rhodesia and station it on the Transvaal border to guard the railway works. In the event, the public protest of three Bechuana chiefs opposed to the transfer of their country to the Company, limited the territory available to Rhodes to a strip of land on the Protectorate's eastern border.¹⁰ This strip of land would provide

⁹ Garvin, J.L, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain Volume Three: 1895-1900*, Macmillan and Co. Ltd. London 1934, pp.36-37. Garvin records the conversations as having taken place on 1 August, 20 August, 5 September and 6 November. He maintains that the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain never saw Rhodes's secretary, Dr Rutherford Harris, alone.

¹⁰ For the visit of the three Bechuana Chiefs to Britain see Parsons, Neil, *King Khama, Emperor Joe and the Great White Queen*, University of Chicago Press 1998.

Rhodes with a launch pad for an invasion of the Transvaal when the time was right. It was further announced that Dr Jameson would be stationed in the strip at the village of Pitsani and assume the role of Resident Commissioner.

IV

Rhodes arranged for guns to be smuggled into the Transvaal and for Jameson's troops to be reinforced. Simultaneously he despatched his brother, Frank Rhodes, to orchestrate the rising in Johannesburg. When Jameson arrived there on 19 November he was presented with a letter of invitation from prominent members of the Uitlander Community to come to the aid of unarmed men, women, and children in Johannesburg who allegedly lived in fear of Boer retaliation. This letter was to be Jameson's justification for crossing the border.

Amid continuing disputes over provisions and the nature of the reformed State, the revolutionary impetus at Johannesburg stalled. Rhodes contacted Jameson at Pitsani and warned him not to move, a warning echoed by the leaders of the reform committee who sent two messengers to Jameson advising him that the revolution had petered out. The latter, confident in the power of his Maxim guns, dismissed the overtures of restraint and at 6.30pm on 29 December 1895 led his small force of 372 men out of Pitsani en-route to Malmani. Here, on 30 December, they rendezvoused with 122 men of the British Bechuanaland Police before setting out for Johannesburg. Shadowed by Boer commandos Jameson reached Krugersdorp on 1 January, where he was to rendezvous with Frank Rhodes's Johannesburg force.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Jameson, the reform committee had opened negotiations with Kruger, and forbidden Frank Rhodes from riding to his aid. Resuming his march towards Johannesburg Jameson discovered that he had been shepherded into a trap. Ahead

of them was a large Boer force on the top of a low cliff. It was impossible to skirt the cliff and impossible to retreat, as the Boers in the rear were closing in.¹¹ Exhausted, surrounded and outnumbered, Jameson's men kept up the fight until, convinced of the futility of further resistance, a white flag was raised.

Jameson and his men were initially incarcerated in Pretoria, before being permitted to return to Britain for trial. Sixty four members of the Reform Committee were arrested. The leaders - including Frank Rhodes - were initially sentenced to death (later commuted). Sensing a double-cross, Rhodes's Afrikaner allies at the Cape deserted him, and as the foundations upon which he had built his political career began to crumble Rhodes resigned as Premier of the Cape Colony.

In Britain, speculation raged as to what had compelled Jameson to cross the border, what role had Cecil Rhodes and the Imperial authorities played in the crisis, and how would the world react to this flagrant breach of international law? Such were the questions which engaged the British press in the first days of 1896.

V

It is impossible to discuss Rhodes's reputation in light of the Jameson Raid without acknowledging from the outset that the esteem in which he was held by the British people was heavily influenced by external events. Their estimation of Rhodes was not static; rather it ebbed and flowed as events unfolded and as new evidence came to light.

The Jameson Raid did not occur in a vacuum, there was almost never a moment when it could be judged as an event in itself, but only in the context of the imperial and international events which

¹¹ Thomas, p.300.

accompanied it. Such events radically altered the nature of the debate in Britain and transformed the public's perception of the raiders.

Perhaps the most significant of these developments was the revelation that on 3 January 1896 the German Emperor Wilhelm II had sent a telegram to the Transvaal President Paul Kruger congratulating him on having successfully repulsed Jameson and his filibusters.

In Britain this gesture - widely interpreted as an affront to national dignity and as a revelation of underlying German hostility to the British Empire – had the effect of momentarily unifying the country against a common foe. Such a climate presented the supporters of the Chartered Company with an opportunity to present Jameson and - to the extent that his complicity was recognised - Rhodes himself, as the thwarters of a sinister German conspiracy to strike at imperial interests in South Africa. W.T. Stead described the so-called 'Kruger Telegram' as 'the key to the crisis', and proceeded to explain its transformative effect upon his countrymen:

Instantly all discussion as to the rights and wrongs of Dr Jameson's ride passed into the background. Dr Jameson had blundered, no doubt, but his blundering foray had unmasked an ambush the very existence of which we had not suspected.¹²

In the wake of the 'Kaiser's Telegram' anti-German feeling was evidenced in all quarters. On 5 January the *Manchester Guardian* reported that in the London docklands German and Dutch sailors had been abused by enraged locals, while the windows of German Jewish businessmen in the East End had been smashed and their property vandalised.¹³ A day later, in a firmly worded article under the heading, 'Hands Off', the *Pall Mall Gazette* epitomised the bullish

¹² *Review of Reviews*, February 1896, p.104.

¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1896, p.5.

reaction of the imperial press to Germany's apparent intrusion into Britain's sphere of influence:

If Germany thinks she has any right of interference, based upon a suddenly remembered kinship or on anything else, she is mistaken. If she attempts to enforce any such imaginary rights she will be resisted by all the means at our disposal.¹⁴

The 'Kruger telegram', dismissed in certain quarters as merely further evidence of the Kaiser's eccentricity of temperament, was elsewhere interpreted as a document which bore the hallmarks of national policy. *The Times* informed its readers that the telegram had been drawn up in the wake of a conference at the Imperial Chancellor's Palace, attended by, among others, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary for the Navy, at the request of the German Chancellor.¹⁵ The *Pall Mall Gazette* argued that the telegram was not a 'spontaneous exhibition of eccentricity', but the 'climax of a deliberate and carefully considered policy'.¹⁶

The Kaiser himself would later complain that he had personally opposed the 'Kruger telegram', and had been supported in this position by the Secretary of State for the Navy, Admiral Hollman. Only at the insistence of the Imperial Chancellor, Prince Hohenlohe, had the Kaiser reluctantly appended his signature.¹⁷

In the wake of the telegram the rumour mill went into overdrive, as commentators undertook a revision of Germany's political, economic, and military relations with the Transvaal. The journalist W.R. Lawson, writing in the *Contemporary Review* under the heading 'German Intrigues in the Transvaal', pointed to the monopolies the Kruger administration had recently granted to German companies in such diverse industries as dynamite production, collieries, brickworks, waterworks, the provision of electric lighting to the capital, Pretoria,

¹⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 January 1896, p.1.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 4 January 1896, p.9.

¹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 January 1896, p.1.

¹⁷ Wilhelm II, *The Kaiser's Memoirs*, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York and London 1922, pp.83-85.

and most notably the German railway monopoly, which had enabled the Transvaal to divert valuable traffic away from the Empire's Natal and Cape Colony lines.¹⁸

In an article entitled, 'The Kaiser's Indiscretion', the journalist George Steevens interpreted the telegram as an assertion of German colonial ambition, arguing that the latter coveted access to the trade of the Rand, and had identified the harbour at Delagoa Bay as a means by which to undermine British security in South Africa and menace imperial communications with the East.¹⁹

As information concerning the true motivations of the Raid, and the exact nature of Rhodes's involvement remained allusive, it became possible for those sympathetic to the Chartered Company to transform Jameson's catastrophic blunder into an ill-fated attempt to subvert a dastardly German plot. *The Times* argued that while evidence of a conspiracy implicating the Chartered Company or British officials had yet to emerge, there was ample evidence to prove the existence of a German-Boer plot to undermine British influence in South Africa. The journal suggested that only time would tell what service Jameson and his men had rendered to the Empire in exposing this conspiracy.²⁰

The writer George Seymour Fort would later expand on this idea in an article for the *Nineteenth Century*, entitled 'The True Motive and Reason for Dr Jameson's Raid.' Fort stated that thwarting Germany's imperial ambitions and preserving British interests had been Rhodes's overriding ambition from the beginning. Rhodes, sensible of Kruger's hostility, and aware of the Transvaal's importation of arms - particularly German-made Mauser rifles - not to mention the

¹⁸ *Contemporary Review*, February 1896, pp.292-304.

¹⁹ *New Review*, February 1896, p.182.

²⁰ *The Times*, 13 January 1896, p.9.

presence of German army reservists in the two Boer Republics, had once more acted decisively to arrest any threat to British interests.²¹

As a long-time Rhodes associate Fort was hardly a disinterested observer, nor was he the only Rhodes loyalist to weigh into the debate. The Chartered Company's secretary, Dr Rutherford Harris, contributed a prominent article to the *New Review* in which he explained that it was Germany's intention to erect a metaphorical fence around the Transvaal for the exploitation of German monopolists. For this reason he argued, both the Transvaal and German Governments' had engaged in the deliberate attempt to subvert the otherwise natural progression towards South African federation. Harris presented Rhodes's interest in Zambesia as having been predicated on the latter's desire to prevent Germany from linking her existing colonies on the coast and thereby exclude Britain from the African interior. Harris placed the Raid in the context of an on-going struggle for regional supremacy, highlighting the Boer raids into Stellaland and Goschen which had been implemented with Kruger's tacit approval.²²

The *Morning Post* praised Harris for having provided a timely reminder of Rhodes's great services to the Empire, and for having placed the Raid in its true context, namely the on-going struggle to maintain British hegemony in the face of German-Boer hostility.²³

W.T. Stead perpetuated the myth of Rhodes as the thwarter of German machinations in an article sub-titled 'Check-mate to Germany', in which Stead credited Rhodes with having 'unmasked the German ambush and [of having] rallied the whole Empire as one man in opposition to German designs in South Africa'.²⁴

Amid the sabre-rattling and expressions of indignation, allegations of Rhodes's involvement in the conspiracy, and Jameson's own

²¹ *Nineteenth Century*, June 1896, pp.873-880.

²² *New Review*, March 1896, pp.331-348.

²³ *Morning Post*, 25 February 1896, p.4.

²⁴ *Review of Review*, February 1896, p.107.

actions, were temporarily overlooked. There appeared to be an almost universal willingness to give Jameson the benefit of the doubt, even though from the first the Raid bore the hallmarks of premeditation.²⁵

The Raid had exposed Britain's vulnerability at the end of the nineteenth century, the sense of being without friends and surrounded by covetous rivals. This sense of national anxiety which lurked behind the confident, expansionist façade had already been exposed by the Venezuela Crisis, which had continued into 1896. The Kaiser's telegram did nothing to allay fears that Britain was a nation under siege. It was this sense of crisis that encouraged even the most Radical journals to project their ire in the direction of the external threat. *Reynolds's Newspaper* epitomised this belief in the need for a show of national solidarity, explaining:

At this juncture, when our interests, or it may be our very existence, is threatened on all sides, it behoves the whole of our people to join in friendly and firm allegiance against our enemies, from whatever quarter they may come.²⁶

The anti-German rhetoric did not convince everyone. In a letter to *The Times* Henry Labouchere expressed his surprise that the telegram should have occasioned such national indignation. Labouchere was not alone in believing that Germany's stance was not so much anti-British as anti-Rhodes. According to this theory, the telegram was not an act of provocation; rather, it was an expression of jubilation that a plan which had threatened to embroil Britain and Germany in conflict had been foiled. 'The defeat of Dr Jameson's forces', Labouchere argued, 'no more discredits us than did the defeat of Captain Kidd discredit our ancestors.' He insisted that the Company be stripped of its charter and that the administration of Rhodesia be placed in the hands of the Imperial Government. In doing so, Labouchere's was one of the first voices to call for an

²⁵ *Speaker*, 4 January 1896, pp.6-7.

²⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 January 1896, p.4.

investigation into the Raid and into the past record of the Chartered Company.²⁷

Was there any truth to Labouchere's assertions, did Germans really draw such a distinction between Company and country? *The Times'* correspondent in Berlin did not think so. He countered Labouchere's theory by reporting that German opinion considered Jameson's force to be *truly* British in character, representing both Company *and* Imperial interests. Indeed, in Germany, the belief persisted that the Raid had been developed under 'influential auspices', with the express purpose of bringing the South African Republic back into the imperial fold.²⁸

Writing in *Truth* Labouchere drew national attention to what he considered to be the incestuous relationship between British officials and the Chartered Company. Rhodes as Managing Director was also the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony; his brother, Frank Rhodes, was identified as one of the principal revolutionaries; the High Commissioner of South Africa, Sir Hercules Robinson, was understood to be Rhodes's political ally and had been a past-times director of both De Beers and Rhodes's Standard Bank of Africa; all the while the husband of the Queen's grand-daughter was 'guinea-pigging' on the Company's board. If the telegram represented a rebuke to Britain, this was only to be expected as Germany had reasonably requested the maintenance of the status quo.²⁹

Writing in the *National Review*, the author F. Reginald Statham insisted that the Transvaal had been forced into the arms of Germany as a direct result of Rhodes's aggressive manoeuvrings in South Africa. Under Rhodes's influence the policy of the Imperial Government had been converted into one of hostility towards the Transvaal, which had compelled the Boers to seek allies in the interests of national security. Once again, Statham insisted that 'The

²⁷ *The Times*, 7 January 1896, p.7.

²⁸ *Ibid*: 3 January 1896, p.5; see also Wilhelm II, pp.83-85.

²⁹ *Truth*, 16 January 1896, p.143.

good understanding between Pretoria and Berlin is not anti-British but anti-Chartered Company.³⁰

A consensus emerged in the Liberal press that the national reaction to the Kaiser's telegram had been disproportionate.³¹ A contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* epitomised this sentiment when he accused the British public of 'burning their house to roast a chicken'.³² Britain, after all, was the world's greatest naval power, Germany a land power; as the *Daily Chronicle* remarked, 'the elephant does not attack the whale'.³³ Labouchere explained the over-reaction by arguing that the Imperial Government had colluded with Rhodes's supporters in the press to 'drag a red herring' across the Company's trail to distract public attention from the accountability of that 'pernicious gang of shady adventurers'.³⁴

This begs the question what reason did the Imperial Government have to protect the Chartered Company by exaggerating the German threat? Rhodes was considered to be a valuable asset to the strength and unity of the Empire in South Africa, both Conservative and Liberal front benches retained a sense of responsibility for the Chartered Company, the former for having granted the charter, the latter for having overseen the prosecution of the Matabele War. Both parties had an interest in diverting attention away from allegations of Colonial Office complicity, and of defending Britain's reputation. Additionally, Labouchere believed that the Conservative Government wished to divert public attention from its 'failure at Constantinople' and from backing out of the 'impossible position' it had assumed in regard to Venezuela.³⁵ Moreover, both Labouchere and the *Daily Chronicle* believed that the telegram had provided the Government

³⁰ *National Review*, March 1896, pp.33-50.

³¹ *Speaker*, 29 Feb 1896, p.228; *Manchester Guardian*, 18 January 1896, p.7; *Daily Chronicle*, 13 January 1896, p.4.

³² *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1896, pp.265-296.

³³ *Daily Chronicle*, 13 January 1896, p.4.

³⁴ *Truth*, 23 January 1896, pp.205-206.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

and their allies in the press with the justification to call for significant investment in naval reinforcements.³⁶

All agreed that if the Kaiser had not sent his provocative telegram, the reaction to the Jameson Raid in Britain would likely have been of an entirely different character. As W.T. Stead explained:

But for this folly on the part of the Kaiser the public indignation would have spent itself on the head of Dr Jameson and the conspiracy; but in a moment the scene changed, and the public indignation was shifted to the German conspiracy against British supremacy in South Africa.³⁷

VI

In addition to the apparent German threat, the question of Uitlander rights proved a further complication to those seeking to indict Rhodes in the court of public opinion. The Transvaal Government's decision to deny certain civic rights - most notably the franchise - to the Uitlander population had attracted widespread criticism in the months leading up to the Raid. Of this alleged tyranny *The Times* indignantly declared: 'Seldom or never in modern times has a community of civilized men been compelled to endure such a travesty of government.'³⁸ In the months following the Raid the iniquitous nature of the Transvaal Government was employed as a principal justification for the raiders' actions.

In an article for the *Contemporary Review*, the writer William Basil Worsfold justified imperial 'interference' in Transvaal affairs on the grounds of protecting African rights, and of facilitating the prosperous development of South Africa. On the subject of the Uitlander franchise, Worsfold insisted that Britain had only demanded that Her Majesty's subjects in the Transvaal be afforded the same rights enjoyed by Afrikaners at the Cape. There was also a legal dimension

³⁶ Ibid; also *Daily Chronicle*, 13 January 1896, p.4.

³⁷ *Review of Reviews*, February 1896, pp.117-136 (p.135).

³⁸ *The Times*, 2 January 1896, p.7.

to Worsfold's argument which would occupy the minds of many contemporary commentators. This was founded upon the argument that the Transvaal was a vassal state, thereby justifying British interference in defence of Her Majesty's subjects.³⁹ Worsfold developed this argument in an article for the *Fortnightly Review* in which he asserted that the retrocession of the Transvaal to the Boers had been actuated on the understanding that migrants would not be subjected to any political inequality or commercial disadvantage.⁴⁰

In the popular imagination the Uitlander cause was likened to a number of worthy historical precedents. Edward Dicey, writing in the *Nineteenth Century*, likened the Uitlanders to the American colonists of 1776, with all the justifications that had accompanied that successful bid for freedom.⁴¹ Perhaps the most telling historical comparison was made by the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, who likened the Uitlanders to the men of Ulster struggling against adversaries who also held the 'Government and the rifles', and who were equally liable to enter into foreign relations to the detriment of the Empire.

Salisbury's comments caused consternation among Home Rule Liberals. The *Daily Chronicle* complained that Jameson had been portrayed as the 'good angel of the Union sent to abolish Home Rule and restore the Imperial authority',⁴² while the Liberal statesman John Morley denounced Salisbury's speech as 'unfortunate and lamentable'.⁴³ Nevertheless, the association in the public mind of the Transvaal crisis with the issue of Home Rule persisted, and the cause of the Uitlanders in the Transvaal became a second front in the struggle for imperial unity.

Just as the Kaiser's telegram had, for many, revealed the existence of a German plot to undermine imperial influence, the

³⁹ *Contemporary Review*, April 1896, pp.473-483.

⁴⁰ *Fortnightly Review*, February 1896, pp.260-268.

⁴¹ *Nineteenth Century*, May 1896, pp.721-738.

⁴² *Daily Chronicle*, 1 February 1896, p.4.

⁴³ *Ibid*: 4 February 1896, p.4.

same faction had interpreted the exclusion of the Uitlanders as a precursor to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. An anonymous South African resident contributing to the *New Review* suggested that the exclusion of the Uitlanders was part of Kruger's larger scheme to create an Afrikaner federation beyond the bounds of his own state and thereby eliminate British influence in South Africa.⁴⁴ For Rhodes's allies this fitted well with their existing theory that Rhodes had merely been defending British interests, and in the absence of official support had been forced to take matters into his own hands.

The opposing view was that far from helping the Uitlanders, Rhodes and Jameson had played directly into Kruger's hands. The Uitlander cause had attracted broad sympathy; confronted with genuine grievances Kruger had backed himself into a corner. From this perspective the Raid had given Kruger the excuse to postpone electoral reform indefinitely, while uniting Afrikaners across South Africa in opposition to British rule. The *Daily News* complained that 'Unless Mr Kruger had made the world he could hardly have arranged things more agreeably for himself.'⁴⁵

VII

Of all the justifications posited for the Raid the most romantic interpretation, and the one which perhaps above all others captured the public imagination, was the notion that Jameson and his men had been responding to a plea for help from the mining community of Johannesburg. Allegedly the lives and property of this predominantly British community had been threatened by the counter-revolutionary fervour of Kruger's burghers.

It would later emerge that the so-called 'women and children letter', addressed to Jameson by prominent citizens of

⁴⁴ *New Review*, May 1896, pp.587-596.

⁴⁵ *Daily News*, 7 January 1896, p.4.

Johannesburg, and requesting his urgent assistance, was in fact a red herring; a means of justifying the intervention of an armed force in overthrowing the Transvaal Government. In the early months of 1896, however, in addition to thwarting German ambitions and fighting for the rights of Uitlanders, it completed a trinity of justifications for Jameson's actions.

Jameson himself perpetuated the myth by informing the British press that the welfare of his compatriots had been his sole objective:

I only crossed the frontier because of the urgent appeals addressed to me, and because I fully believed a large number of my fellow countrymen and countrywomen were in dire peril of their lives. It was only to save and protect that I moved.⁴⁶

In view of his confession the *Morning Post* censured the Colonial Secretary for 'uncompromisingly condemning the action of Dr Jameson'.⁴⁷ Jameson's lack of preparedness - which had doomed the Raid as a military enterprise - now proved a most useful alibi. The notion that Jameson and his petty band had set out to overthrow the Transvaal Government seemed preposterous. This in-turn lent credence to the belief that the Raid had been made in response to a desperate call for help, and in this regard the 'women and children' narrative proved most useful.

The letter was picked up elsewhere in the Rhodes supporting press, notably by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which from the first credited Jameson with 'the best possible motives'.⁴⁸ It also inspired numerous poems, plays, and other expressions of cultural approval for Jameson's actions. The idea that these expressions would be limited to those of the much-maligned 'music-hall Jingo's', would be challenged a few days later when the new poet laureate, Alfred Austin, offered a celebratory ode entitled *Jameson's Ride*; selective stanzas of which are given below:

⁴⁶ *Morning Post*, 8 January 1896, p.4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 January 1896, p.1.

Jameson's Ride

II

Let lawyers and statesmen addle
Their pates over points of law:
If sound be our sword, and saddle,
And gun-gear, who cares one straw?
When men of our own blood pray us
To ride to their kinsfolk's aid,
Not heaven itself shall stay us
From the rescue they call a raid.

III

There are girls in the gold-reef city,
There are mothers and children too!
And they cry, "Hurry up! For pity!"
So what can a brave man do?
If even we win they'll blame us:
If we fail, they will howl and hiss.
But there's many a man lives famous
For daring a wrong like this!⁴⁹

The poem contained all the ingredients necessary for a popular romance: damsels in distress, impossible odds, courage under fire; framed in this way, the Jameson Raid was a *Boy's Own* adventure. The critics may have dismissed the poem as hackneyed, and it may have discomfited the Imperial Government, but even Rhodes's staunchest critics were forced to concede that as a piece of political

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 11 January 1896, p.9.

propaganda, it had been remarkably effective. Commenting on the poem in *Truth* Labouchere admitted:

Whatever may be the general opinion amongst people of taste and education of Mr Austin's lines on 'Jameson's Ride', it is clear that in certain circles that ill-advised poem has achieved instant popularity.⁵⁰

Less famous than Austin's poem, though equally as relevant in capturing British attitudes to the Raid, was a work which amounted to the Liberal press's answer to Austin. Entitled *The Second Jameson Raid*, its tacit purpose was to deconstruct the Jingo myths surrounding the Raid by presenting the case from a purely legal perspective.

Contemporaneous with the crisis in the Transvaal, another Jameson was making the news in Britain. A youth by the name of Herbert Jameson - no relation to the famous Doctor - had been ejected from a public house following an altercation with a barman. He had fired his pistol in retaliation, and though missing his intended quarry, had struck a barmaid in the arm. For this offence the youth had been sentenced to penal servitude for a period of three years. In making this humorous comparison between 'The Two Jameson's', it became possible for their opponents to divest both Rhodes and Jameson of their patriotic livery and in doing so expose their alleged criminality:

The Second Jameson Raid

Another Jameson, Hooray!

Write, Austin, write another lay!

He aimed straight at the barman's head,

But hit the barmaid's arm instead.

Wrong? Was it wrong? Why, surely no:

He felt an impulse to do so.

⁵⁰ *Truth*, 16 January 1896, p.127.

If he had killed that barman now,
 None would have blamed the deed, I trow.
 By "noble impulses" inspired,
 He saw that enemy and fired.
 If both the barman and the maid
 Had fallen dead through Jameson's raid,
 Oh! what a hero he'd have stood,
 Extolled by all the great and good;
 Each music-hall had been aflame
 Applauding Jameson's glorious name.
 His "generous impulse", sound and strong,
 Had banished all idea of wrong.
 But now, alas! the strait-laced judge
 From starched legality won't budge.
 "Jameson", he says, "your efforts fail,
 And, therefore, you must go to gaol."
 The second Jameson's led away.
 Write, Austin, write another lay!⁵¹

There can be little doubt that of the two pieces Austin's original exerted the greatest influence. The Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square incorporated a reading of Austin's poem into their programme of entertainments, and it is clear from the numerous references in the press that the smaller theatres followed suit.⁵²

For all the arguments concerning the legality of the Raid, and the motivations which had actuated Rhodes and Jameson, there was almost universal recognition of the latter's 'pluck'. The Raid had become the talk of the land, and through the burgeoning

⁵¹ *Speaker*, 15 February 1896, p.189.

⁵² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 January 1896, p.1.

entertainment industry as much as through the press, Jameson, and by extension Rhodes himself, had become popular celebrities. At Madame Tussaud's that January a special exhibit depicted life-sized portrait models of Rhodes, Jameson, and Kruger.⁵³

VIII

Rhodes's opponents had a more prosaic explanation for Jameson's Raid, namely the aggrandisement of the Chartered Company. Borrowing heavily from an earlier theory concerning Rhodes's economic motivations, it was argued that the failure to discover a second Rand in Rhodesia, had finally persuaded Rhodes to risk all in an attempt to topple the Kruger Government, and so absorb the Transvaal into the Company's sphere.

Convinced that the Raid was the result of a complex financial conspiracy, Labouchere postulated a series of wild theories, each more incredible than the last; arguing, for example, that the Raid had been orchestrated to enable the Chartered Company to levy taxes on the Transvaal's mines; or even more implausibly, that the conspirators had wished to demonstrate how 'dangerous' the Company was and how injurious to the peace of South Africa, in the hope that the Imperial Government would buy them out and in doing so save them from inevitable bankruptcy.⁵⁴

Labouchere's theories gained support in the Radical press. The *Daily Chronicle* credited him with displaying an 'expert hand' in uncovering the 'intricacies of Chartered finance',⁵⁵ while *Reynolds's Newspaper* informed its readers that 'The serious state of things in South Africa at the present time is the direct outcome of the foolish and immoral policy of Mr Cecil Rhodes.'⁵⁶ Labouchere had been

⁵³ *Daily News*, 27 January 1896, p.4.

⁵⁴ *Truth*, 16 January 1896, pp.143-146.

⁵⁵ *Daily Chronicle*, 14 February 1896, p.4.

⁵⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 19 April 1896, p.4.

correct to suspect Rhodes's complicity at a time when this was far from clear; however, his theoretical commitment to unmasking a capitalist conspiracy would ultimately serve to undermine his case.

In an article for the *Fortnightly Review*, Rhodes's friend, the journalist John Verschoyle, noted that there were two popular financial interpretations of the Raid advocated by Rhodes's opponents. Firstly, the notion that the Raid had been undertaken to install a more progressive government in the Transvaal, and thereby liberate the mining industry from Kruger's mismanagement, while presumably installing a government which would be more amenable to federation under the British flag. Secondly, the notion that Rhodes had intended to seize control of the Transvaal's mines and bring them under the auspices of the Chartered Company. Today, the first explanation is considered the more accurate; curiously, Verschoyle suggested that the latter was more influential among contemporaries.⁵⁷

The accusations of self-aggrandisement which accompanied both the Radical interpretation of the Matabele War and subsequently the Jameson Raid, were themselves part of a broader anti-capitalist agenda. The South African authoress Olive Schreiner, who would become one of Rhodes's staunchest critics, had prophesied two possible futures for South Africa, one represented by the parochial, agricultural Boers, and the other, a Rhodes-ian dystopia of mines, factories, and big business. In describing her 1895 political tract entitled *The Political Situation*,⁵⁸ Schreiner declared it to be 'anti-Rhodes and anti-capitalist'.⁵⁹ She would later explain to W.T. Stead:

It's not Rhodes I object to it's his money...The day will come when...men and women will rise, and end for ever the power

⁵⁷ *Fortnightly Review*, March 1896, pp.483-494.

⁵⁸ Schreiner, Olive, with Cronwright-Schreiner, C.S., *The Political Situation*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1896.

⁵⁹ Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 27 July 1895, Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription, letter line No. 30.

of these millionaires who seek to crush beneath the weight of their gold the freedom of a whole people.⁶⁰

Neither Labouchere nor Schreiner were particularly sympathetic to, or had a special interest in, the welfare of Africans. The historian R.J. Hind summarised the former's position in regard to indigenous peoples as follows:

...he was convinced that while men behaved like sheep they would continue to be shorn, and he apparently felt no obligation to draw attention to shearing if it were accepted passively, and could not be used to argue against forward policies.⁶¹

Labouchere's opposition to imperial expansion - for he was by no means an ideological opponent of Empire itself - was founded upon the belief that it deferred social reforms at home while increasing Britain's responsibilities abroad. He was not so much a humanitarian as a materialist, his concern was for the nation's finances, and he objected to a minority of 'buccaneers' acquiring great wealth at the taxpayer's expense.

In imagining a Transvaal in which the Randlords had assumed absolute power, the *Daily Chronicle* envisaged the emergence of a 'capitalist Government without any mitigating feature, without any one to question its power...' dominating the country so completely that the labourers and miners would be 'completely in its hands, and pledged to do its bidding...' The interests of the Transvaal Boers in contrast were portrayed as being, 'purely bound up in the land that they love...a simple, pastoral, money-despising folk...who constitute the moral backbone of the State'.⁶²

⁶⁰ Olive Schreiner to W.T. Stead, after start: January 1896, before end: July 1896, National Archives Depot, Pretoria, Oliver Schreiner Letters Project transcription, letter lines No.9-18.

⁶¹ Hind, R.J., *Henry Labouchere and the Empire 1880-1905*, The Athlone Press, University of London, 1972, p.229.

⁶² *Daily Chronicle*, 10 February 1896, p.4.

To his opponents Rhodes embodied capitalism as much as he did imperialism, and in Rhodes they discerned an unwelcome admixture of the two. Labouchere concluded:

He is not a money-grubber in the sense that some of his associates are; but seeks to combine the acquisition of a huge private fortune with political ambition. This is contrary to all the honourable traditions of British public men...he cannot be regarded as a man actuated alone by patriotic motives, but rather a man who makes his patriotism subserve the acquisition of money by very questionable means.⁶³

Rhodes was understood to be a new breed of capitalist, to be ranked alongside contemporary titans such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Morgan. To his opponents he represented the crushing, dehumanising power of monopoly capitalism at a time when the dangerous convergence of great commercial wealth and political power was becoming increasingly apparent.

IX

When Rhodes and Jameson returned to Britain in February 1896 they were greeted as conquering heroes. Rhodes was the first to arrive at the beginning of the month. He had told an audience in South Africa that he was returning home to 'face the music'. Instead he faced a welcoming committee representing a broad cross-section of British society.

The Times estimated that the cheering crowds who had gathered at Paddington Station to welcome Rhodes numbered in the thousands, including five hundred working men connected with London's South African shipping trade, and a delegation from the British and Colonial Patriotic and Industrial league. The latter bore an address of welcome along with copies of resolutions adopted at eight representative meetings of working men held across London.⁶⁴ The

⁶³ *Truth*, 20 February 1896, p.452.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 5 February 1896, p.6.

resolution thanked Rhodes for his services to the Empire, in particular for opening up southern Africa to British manufactures, and offered him their support in the present crisis.⁶⁵

Having thanked the delegations for the reception he had been afforded, Rhodes stated that he had been assured that the working classes of Britain took a great interest in the development of British South Africa, before departing to the sound of renewed cheers.⁶⁶ This episode highlights the important economic considerations which led many in British society, both high and low, to espouse Rhodes's dream of African Empire. As one contemporary explained: 'all of them look to Mr Rhodes as to the Moses who is to strike the rock for them to drink, and to open new fields of adventure'.⁶⁷

Such had been the demonstration of popular support for Rhodes that the prospect of Dr Jameson's return later that month was, for the Imperial authorities, cause for considerable anxiety. Even sympathetic journals, such as the *Pall Mall Gazette*, argued that mass demonstrations of popular support for Jameson would be impolitic, and would damage Britain's credibility in the eyes of the world.⁶⁸

If the welcome afforded Jameson's troopers offered any indication of popular feeling, the concerns of the authorities' were more than justified. Having arrived at Plymouth on 23 February 1896 the troopers had made their way to London by special train. Popular demonstrations had been reported at Bristol and in London where, in spite of the best efforts of officials to prevent a popular demonstration, thousands of well-wishers had gathered to welcome the troopers at the exit of Paddington Station.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1896, pp.265-296 (p.271).

⁶⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1896, p.1.

⁶⁹ *Daily News*, 24 February 1896, p.5.

To dispense with trains and station platforms which may have afforded Jameson an opportunity to receive the acclaim of his countrymen, the steam ship *Victoria*, which had carried Jameson and his officers from Durban, would only pause momentarily in Plymouth Sound before continuing up the Thames to London. This was only partially successful, however, for as the 2nd battalion of the Royal Lancaster Regiment disembarked at Plymouth, each company to leave the ship gave 'Three cheers for Dr Jameson.'⁷⁰

Once it became clear that Jameson would be arriving by river, the crowds in London abandoned their vantage points at Paddington and Waterloo and proceeded to Bow-street Magistrate's Court, where Jameson and his officers were expected to present themselves later that afternoon.

As Jameson and his officers made their way up the river, cheers of approval rang out from the crowds lining the banks of the Thames, and from the small craft on the river. In describing the scene a correspondent for the *Daily News* wrote:

...no warrior, laurel-crowned, could have conjured up dreams of a warmer tribute than the welcome that was given to these prisoners on their way to the dock.⁷¹

A similar demonstration awaited the prisoners at Bow-street, where the crowds in the vicinity of the court had rendered the thoroughfare almost impassable. Upon Jameson's arrival hats were taken off, caps flung in the air and cheer after cheer was raised for 'Dr Jim'.⁷² When Jameson finally led his men into the court, one correspondent reported that 'such a cheer arose as was probably never before heard in a London police-court'. The cheering, which was described as 'spontaneous and general', lasted nearly three minutes before order could be restored.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 February 1896, p.5.

⁷¹ *Daily News*, 26 February 1896, p.2.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

In an attempt to diffuse the rising tide of popular enthusiasm, Rhodes's opponents sought - often unconvincingly - to rationalise the public response. A popular stratagem was to belittle the crowds by intimating that they represented the unthinking masses, implying that Jameson's actions were supported out of ignorance. Commenting in *Truth*, Labouchere referred to the crowd disparagingly as 'loafers', declaring:

We know well that the music-hall element in London is prepared to almost deify any persons who commit murder and robbery under the guise of "extension of empire". These poor fools probably hardly know where Africa is, and still less do they know of the circumstances of the charges against the Jameson raiders.⁷⁴

Labouchere insisted that support for the Company had been formed by a curious alliance of the 'music hall Jingo's' described above, and the elite of British society who stood to gain financially from their patronage of the Chartered Company. Satisfied that the demonstrations represented little more than a combination of self-interest and plain ignorance, he concluded:

Fortunately...fine ladies and fine gentlemen, and music-hall loafers, even when banded together, constitute a very small portion of that consensus which constitutes public-opinion.⁷⁵

In a similar vein the *Manchester Guardian*, having lamented the fact that all warnings against a popular demonstration had evidently fallen on deaf ears, complained that it was useless to commend restraint to 'foolish mobs and London hostesses'.⁷⁶

Critics feared that taken together 'the social influence of the Chartered Company and its backers, the Laureate's jingles, and the newspaper cant about the Elizabethan spirit', had rendered sections of the population highly receptive to the notion that Jameson and his men had been motivated by all the finer feelings.⁷⁷ Labouchere, who

⁷⁴ *Truth*, March 5 1896, p.576.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1896, p.4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

was fond of making historical comparisons, complained that the press had sold Jameson and his troopers to the British public as though they were 'Leonidas and his Spartans',⁷⁸ or 'Achilles and his Myrmidons',⁷⁹ while to the *Manchester Guardian* it was evident that the Company's admirers had largely succeeded in re-packaging Jameson as another 'Gordon or Havelock'. Both commentators were equally keen to point out that 'intelligent people here' regarded all the chief actors in this 'intrigue' with suspicion.⁸⁰ The *Daily Chronicle* followed suit, reminding its readers:

The cheers in Bow-street Police-court no more represent the English nation than the gibberings of the monkey-folk in Mr Kipling's poem...the nation does not associate itself with yesterday's unhappy demonstrations. It regrets them; it knows that if they were general throughout London and the provinces it would have to pay a penalty for them.⁸¹

The reaction of the Liberal press betrayed its growing concern at the manifestation of popular imperialism, which reflected a wider concern regarding the on-going democratisation of society. Even the *Observer*, which was typically sympathetic to Rhodes, complained:

There is too great a tendency, even in this country, to regard the heroism of Dr Jameson as the principal object of public concern. The modern Jingo of the music halls means to be patriotic, but it is high time that the democracy should learn that true imperialism and honest patriotism are inconsistent with acts like those of Dr Jameson.⁸²

The allegation that chauvinistic nationalism was a threat to the stability of the Empire had been levelled at Rhodes and his supporters from the beginning. Critics asserted that it was the Imperialists' inability to appreciate the complexities of international relations, and leaven their patriotism with a modicum of restraint, which threatened to embroil Britain in conflict with foreign Powers.⁸³

⁷⁸ *Truth*, 23 January 1896, p.206.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*: 13 February 1896, p.389.

⁸⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1896, p.4.

⁸¹ *Daily Chronicle*, 26 February 1896, p.6.

⁸² *Observer*, 26 January 1896, p.4.

⁸³ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1896, p.4.

X

At the end of April 1896, as the trial of the Johannesburg Reform Committee drew to a close in Pretoria, the Transvaal Government prepared to play its trump card; a revelation of such magnitude that it would transform overnight the global perception of the Jameson Raid.

Following the defeat of the raiders at Doornkop, Transvaal forces had discovered a despatch box belonging to one of Jameson's Officers, Captain Robert White. Inside the Boers discovered code-books, confidential letters and telegrams which provided the key to decoding a series of cyphered telegrams which had passed between Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Jameson's base at Pitsani, the previous December. Extracts from the telegrams were published by the Kruger administration and were subsequently included in the Transvaal Green book, which accompanied a full report of the Reform Committee's trial. The revelations were explosive and for the first time provided unassailable proof that Rhodes had been the prime mover behind the incursion.⁸⁴

The justifications for the Raid, propagated with such success by Rhodes's admirers in the preceding months, were immediately rendered moot. Rocked by the revelations, Rhodes's supporters considered their position while the Liberal press – to whom the cyphered telegrams represented the long-awaited 'smoking gun' - took the offensive. There were fresh calls for the charter to be revoked and for Rhodes and his accomplices to be returned to Britain to face trial under article twelve of the Foreign Enlistment Act.⁸⁵ It would be a travesty, insisted the *Manchester Guardian*, if Jameson

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 1 May 1896, p.9.

⁸⁵ Section 12 of the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870, c.90 (Regnal. 33 and 34 Vict.) 'Any person who aids, abets, counsels, or procures the commission of any offence against this Act shall be liable to be tried and punished as a principal offender.'

and his officers – mere underlings – were to be tried and punished while the instigators of the plot remained at large.⁸⁶

His opponents anticipated a backlash against Rhodes in the metropolis. Pressure upon him to resign as Managing Director of the Company would surely become irresistible. Deprived of its greatest asset and guiding spirit the Company's powers would be curtailed, its charter would be revoked, and the ill-advised attempt to resurrect the chartered company as a means of expanding the Empire would once more pass into the pages of history.

This at least was the theory; for while the London Board of the Company had not been directly implicated in the Raid, in the months that followed it would be criticised as much for what it did not know as for what it did. The London Board's ignorance of the South African conspiracy was interpreted as yet further evidence of its impotence and subservience to Rhodes. The *Manchester Guardian* summarised the Board's predicament thus:

If it clings to Mr Rhodes, Mr Beit, and Mr Harris, it will deserve to lose its charter for condoning their acts; and even if it cashiers them, it would deserve to lose it for the absence of the least sign of administrative capacity or experience in the more respectable part of its own body.⁸⁷

Radicals suggested that the revelation of the cyphered telegrams had been akin to holding up a mirror to the face of the late nineteenth century empire. It revealed the deception which lay behind the fine talk of rescuing women and children, the attempted coercion of a friendly state masquerading as the fighting of political oppression within the Imperial sphere, and the essential hypocrisy of Britain's civilising mission in Africa. In describing the impact of the telegrams upon British society the *Manchester Guardian* explained:

...the revelations of last Thursday have acted as the spectacle of an acquaintance rolling in the gutter might act on a man in whom the habit of toping had not yet gone very far. They have

⁸⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 May 1896, p.5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 4 May 1896, p.4.

given for the first time a startling glimpse of the real depths to which it has been proposed to Englishmen that they should sink, and the result has been a sudden recoil of disgust.⁸⁸

In light of the new evidence *Reynolds's Newspaper* condemned the Raid as a 'miserable German Jew stock-jobbing transaction', and took evident delight in mocking the heroic pretensions of the raiders and their supporters.⁸⁹ Labouchere declared that the imperialist press was shaken, noting that even *The Times* had thrown up its brief for Rhodes, having expended all apologies and pretexts.⁹⁰ The editor of *Truth* delighted in reminding his readers that he had opposed Rhodes 'In season and out of season', and would later inform the Commons that he had long considered himself a modern Cassandra, blessed with the power of prophecy, and the curse of never being believed. His warnings had been ignored in the past; he now anticipated that all would admit the truth.⁹¹

The revelations chafed with British perceptions of their own empire as the embodiment of freedom and justice. A contributor to the *Observer* pleaded with his countrymen to recognise the need of building and maintaining the Empire upon honourable foundations; smash and grab raids such as those practiced by Rhodes and Jameson would lead only to ignominy and imperial weakness. The author warned that both Louis IX and Napoleon Bonaparte - the historical figure most frequently likened to Rhodes himself - had cherished a 'lust for power and the thirst for ascendancy'. Both had, in their turn, succeeded in uniting 'the civilised world against them'.⁹²

The significance of the cyphered telegrams had been immediately apparent to Rhodes's supporters in the press. *The Times* sympathised with his desire to assist the Uitlanders, however, the journal could only conclude that 'he had responsibilities of a wider kind which should have restrained him from mixing actively in the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 May 1896, p.4.

⁹⁰ *Truth*, 7 May 1896, p.1138.

⁹¹ HC Deb 8 May 1896, Vol. 40 cc884-975; also *The Times*, 9 May 1896, p.12.

⁹² *Observer*, 21 June 1896, p.4.

movement'. This was a rebuke to Rhodes but it was not the wholesale defection his opponents had anticipated. Within days *The Times* had recovered its composure and was busily engaged in salvaging what remained of Rhodes's reputation. Labouchere acknowledged as much when, a fortnight later, he accused *The Times* of engaging 'in a desperate campaign to rehabilitate the shattered idol'; complaining that were *The Times* led, others had been only too willing to follow.⁹³

The argument in defence of Rhodes which was at once the most logical and forthright was that his removal would be unfair to both the Company's shareholders and to the Rhodesian settlers. Writing under the pseudonym 'Festina Lente', *The Times*' Colonial Editor and Rhodes devotee, Flora Shaw, argued that Rhodes had become so synonymous with the Company in the mind of the investing public, that investing money in the Chartered Company had been akin to staking money on the life of Rhodes himself. In addition to the shareholders, Shaw argued that there were the wishes of 7000 Rhodesian settlers to consider.⁹⁴

A shareholder of the Chartered Company wrote a letter to the *Morning Post* warning against any rash action which might compel Rhodes's resignation. Evidently inspired by Alfred Austin, the shareholder enthused in verse: 'Let Dukes and dummies, Jews and bankers die; but give us still our Rhodes's ability.' There was no question, the author maintained, as to the loyalty of the Company's shareholders - they were determined to stand shoulder to shoulder with Rhodes: 'Ornamental Directors of the vacillating jellyfish variety are cheap and abundant', the shareholder concluded, 'there is only one Cecil Rhodes.'⁹⁵

A popular new journal calling itself the *Daily Mail* employed picturesque language of its own in describing the familial bond which

⁹³ *Truth*, 14 May 1896, p.1205.

⁹⁴ *The Times*, 6 May 1896, p.7.

⁹⁵ *Morning Post*, 12 May 1896, p.7.

existed between Rhodes and his shareholders, explaining that he had 'steered their ship through rocks and shoals into golden seas', how could they be expected to consent to his removal now? Continuing with its maritime analogy the journal concluded:

The highly ornamental and eminently respectable figure-heads of the company on this side are most admirable people in their way, but they are not Rhodes, and the hand of a strong man at the helm is more than ever needed when the sky is overcast and breakers are roaring ahead.⁹⁶

If Rhodes's opponents questioned his efficacy as the protector of imperial interests in South Africa, few doubted his significance to the Chartered Company. Remarking upon the predictable loyalty of Chartered shareholders to their embattled chief, Labouchere remarked: 'They would be fools indeed if they did not cling to Mr Rhodes, like drowning mariners to a straw. He is their only asset, the connecting link between them and the stock exchange.'⁹⁷ Elsewhere, the *Manchester Guardian's* South African contributor joked that a more appropriate name for the Chartered Company would have been 'Rhodes Unlimited',⁹⁸ reflecting both its founder's limitless ambition and his personal significance to the success of the enterprise.

Having recovered from the initial shock of the revelations Rhodes's supporters focussed upon his imperial legacy: the addition of a new and apparently prosperous province to the Empire, and the conciliation of the white races as a prerequisite to South African federation under imperial auspices. Rhodes had dedicated himself to the principle of racial unity and equality, the failure of this policy was attributed to the 'obdurate refusal of the Transvaal to remove the just grievances of the Uitlanders'.⁹⁹ In their desire to punish Rhodes and curtail the powers of the Chartered Company, Radicals were accused of surrendering to the demands of both the Transvaal and Britain's European rivals; as *The Times* explained:

⁹⁶ *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1896, p4.

⁹⁷ *Truth*, 21 May 1896, p.1275.

⁹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1896, p.5.

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 2 May 1896, p.13.

The Boers are eager for Mr Rhodes's downfall, not from hatred, but from policy. They desire his overthrow because in him they recognise the most formidable champion of British ascendancy.¹⁰⁰

The *Daily Mail* agreed, dismissing Kruger's animosity towards Rhodes as a clever ruse designed to remove his ablest and most tenacious opponent:

It is an eminently natural desire on his part, since Rhodes is the bulwark of imperialism, and the incarnation of English hopes and English feeling in the country. Consequently, Rhodes is the biggest obstacle to the Dutch dream of Teutonic domination and Anglo-Saxon servitude on the continent.¹⁰¹

With Rhodes and Jameson banished from the country and with the administration of Rhodesia transferred to a 'sleepy Government department operating from the safe-distance of Downing Street', the *Mail* warned that 'the triumph of the German-Dutch combination in South Africa would only be a matter of time'.¹⁰²

Rhodes was deemed absolutely necessary to the maintenance of imperial authority in South Africa. His relationship with the Afrikaner Bond ensured that through him the Imperial Government was able to maintain a modicum of influence over South Africa and thereby safeguard the maintenance of British interests. The *Morning Post* prophetically warned its readers of the dangers posed to the empire by Rhodes's fall:

...his [Rhodes's] summary recall from Africa – supposing it were physically possible – would bring about a condition of chaos which would result either in the abrogation of British authority in South Africa or in a bloody war for its maintenance.¹⁰³

The Times concurred when, amid a sea of accusations and demands for Rhodes's resignation, the journal warned: 'Without him the whole

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1896, p.4.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *Morning Post*, 11 May 1896, p.6.

fabric he has reared may totter helplessly to the ground and drag with it our South African supremacy.’¹⁰⁴

The telegrams had invalidated many of the more romantic interpretations of the Raid, however, the belief in a German-Boer conspiracy to exclude British influence proved remarkably resilient. To combat this dual threat Rhodes’s leadership in South Africa was deemed absolutely essential. ‘...whatever may be the public’s judgement on his acts’, *The Times* asserted, ‘his aims cannot be abandoned without disaster to the Empire’.¹⁰⁵ Support for Rhodes held forth the prospect of a new South African dominion; oppose him, restrain his influence, make concessions to the Empire’s rivals, and the result could be a breakaway Republic.

The image of Rhodes as the selfless patriot who had risked all in the interests of the Empire was quickly resurrected. Rochfort Maguire typified this position in a letter to *The Times* when he insisted that in denying the Uitlanders their civil rights, the Kruger administration was merely keeping the Transvaal ‘open’ until the day when German influence could be frankly admitted. Rhodes possessed everything the world had to give, yet he had risked it all in a too strenuous endeavour to achieve the triumph of a British policy. If his methods were more Elizabethan than Victorian, Maguire argued, it was because circumstances had dictated that they must be so.¹⁰⁶

On 8 May, Sir William Harcourt, the leader of the Liberal Opposition in the Commons, reminded the House that hitherto his party had ‘exercised...a prudent, a proper, and a patriotic reserve’ in not pressing the Government for explanations concerning the Raid. The cyphered telegrams, however, had served to falsify Chamberlain’s initial defence of Rhodes, and Harcourt maintained that the time had now come for an authoritative statement of affairs from the Imperial Government. He reminded the House that while the

¹⁰⁴ *The Times*, 6 May 1896, p.11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*: 4 May 1896, p.11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*: p.12.

Company had been deprived of its military function in the aftermath of the Raid, it continued to administer a vast imperial province; whether it was appropriate for the Company to continue in its present role must, he insisted, be the subject of an immediate inquiry.

In listing the consequences of the Raid, Harcourt conceded that Rhodes had not been actuated by financial gain, a concession which drew cheers of approval from the Government benches. 'Yes', Harcourt retorted, 'but the lust of dominion may lead men quite as much astray as the greed of gold, and unfortunately here we have the combination of both.' Chartered companies, he explained, had been advocated as 'valuable instrument[s] for the cheap extension of Empire'. 'We have been told', he continued, 'that they are a means of obtaining power without responsibility and wealth without expenditure, but we may find that we pay too dear a price for this.'

Harcourt insisted that the Empire must not lose its moral compass, and though clearly aware of Rhodes's significance to the Empire, he argued that the guilty must be punished, 'whatever it may cost'. In the course of the debate Harcourt advocated Rhodes's resignation as the Managing Director of the Chartered Company, and the reformation of the Company Board. He demanded neither the abrogation of the charter nor the prosecution of Rhodes. The leader of the Opposition was no more inclined than the Government to advocate Crown rule, to the evident disappointment of many of his back benchers.¹⁰⁷

Chamberlain, in accusing Harcourt of presenting the case for the prosecution, reminded the House that the Government's first duty was to ensure that Britain remained the paramount power in South Africa. The second consideration was to ensure friendly relations between the British and Dutch colonists. With this declaration Chamberlain effectively inverted Harcourt's request that the

¹⁰⁷ HC Deb 8 May 1896, Vol. 40 cc884-975; see also *Morning Post*, 9 May 1896, p.2; also *The Times*, 9 May 1896, p.12.

Government value national honour above imperial interests. In common with Rhodes's supporters elsewhere Chamberlain sought to contextualise the Raid; he reminded the House that the Transvaal had been 'raiding' its neighbours for the past fifteen years, with the express purpose of extending its own territory - often at Britain's expense - and that such raids had been conducted with President Kruger's tacit approval. The *Morning Post* echoed this interpretation, declaring:

...there is no reason for the British nation to put on sackcloth and ashes, or for British Ministers to stand in white sheets, because a few British subjects lost their heads and imitated the conduct and methods pursued by the Boers themselves on more than one occasion.¹⁰⁸

The matter of Rhodes's perceived necessity to the imperial cause permeated the Government's response to the cyphered telegrams. This attitude was exemplified by the Conservative MP Charles Darling who, in adopting Chamberlain's own insistence upon realpolitik, reminded the House that 'real interests' were at stake. 'If we threw up the Chartered Company', Darling insisted, 'it would not be regarded as an act of magnanimity, but as a piece of downright folly by foreign Powers; and some other nation would be very ready to take what we had surrendered.'¹⁰⁹

In reiterating Rhodes's achievements Chamberlain declared: 'But for Englishmen like Mr Rhodes, our English history would be much poorer and our British dominions would be much smaller.' In what amounted to a personal defence of Rhodes, Chamberlain alluded once again to the significance of colonial attitudes in determining the Government's response; Rhodes still enjoyed influential support from both the British and Dutch communities. At a time when the Empire's authority in South Africa appeared threatened as never before, Chamberlain implied that it would be fool hardy to recall the Empire's most dynamic colonial statesman:

¹⁰⁸ *Morning Post*, 11 May 1896, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ HC Deb 8 May 1896, Vol. 40 cc884-975; see also *The Times*, 9 May 1896, p.12.

I myself, and I believe the majority of people will, think he can best atone for his conduct by doing something to bring into speedy development and to secure the prosperity of the great territory which he has added to the British Crown.¹¹⁰

The Liberal press was disappointed to note a change in Chamberlain's tone, from an apparently strong and resolute stance in the immediate aftermath of the Raid, to his defence of Rhodes in May. In seeking to explain this willingness to defend Rhodes the *Manchester Guardian* posited a theory:

[It is] partly because he [Rhodes] is an Englishman, who is believed to have extended the Empire, partly because he is mixed up with financial interests which it is hazardous to fight against, and partly because he has rendered very important financial services to very exalted personages whom a Conservative Ministry dare not offend.¹¹¹

The majority of his Parliamentary colleagues, and indeed the greater part of the British press, refused to implicate Chamberlain in the Raid directly; however, his defence of Rhodes inevitably raised suspicions. Ever willing to rush in where others feared to tread, *Reynolds's Newspaper* was appalled at what it perceived to be Chamberlain's about-turn; going so far as to entertain the possibility that Chamberlain's involvement in the Raid ran deeper than was popularly assumed. In seeking to rationalise Chamberlain's attitude, *Reynolds's* informed its readers:

...we can only conclude that either Mr Chamberlain was dishonest then, or that he is dishonest now. Either he approved of Rhodes all along and even had an inkling of what was going on, or he has been outvoted in the Cabinet and is now carrying out a policy in which he does not believe.¹¹²

The *Daily Chronicle* speculated as to whether Chamberlain had been 'overborne by his colleagues',¹¹³ while in the House of Commons Labouchere claimed that he had detected a 'hollow ring' in Chamberlain's praise of Rhodes, and considered that the Colonial

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 May 1896, p.10.

¹¹² *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 May 1896, p.4.

¹¹³ *Daily Chronicle*, 11 May 1896, p.6.

Secretary may have been speaking under the influence of his ministerial colleagues, and against his own better judgement.¹¹⁴

The Liberal press correctly interpreted Chamberlain's 'partial white-washing' of Rhodes as an early indication that the axe would not be permitted to fall on Rhodes himself, as evidenced by the deferment of the inquiry, and Chamberlain's focus upon the services Rhodes would render in the future. The *Daily Chronicle* described Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes as a 'deplorable result; an ominous prospect'.¹¹⁵ The journal noted that in eulogising Rhodes as an Empire builder Chamberlain had adopted a pragmatic approach to the crisis; 'confining himself to the mechanism of the game', while subordinating moral considerations to a position of secondary importance.¹¹⁶ Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes was considered dangerously impolitic by the Liberal press, and threatened to undermine Britain's relations with both the Transvaal and the European Powers.

The imperialist press on the other hand noted with satisfaction that the backlash against Rhodes had not been more severe. Considering the verdict passed by the Commons *The Times* concluded:

While the condemnation of Mr Rhodes's errors by Parliament was unqualified and emphatic, it is remarkable that much sympathy for him and much appreciation of his services were displayed during the debate.¹¹⁷

The *Morning Post* noted with satisfaction that Chamberlain's declaration of policy had not been challenged either by a direct vote of censure or by an amendment to reduce the Colonial Vote in question. It was also true that no 'responsible representative of the Opposition [had] ventured to question the decision of the Colonial

¹¹⁴ *The Times*, 9 May 1896, p.12.

¹¹⁵ *Daily Chronicle*, 11 May 1896, p.6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*: 9 May 1896, p.6.

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, 9 May 1896, p.13.

Secretary, or to criticise the statement he [had] made of the resolutions at which the Government had arrived'.¹¹⁸

Safely ensconced in their constituencies or among their supporters in the provinces, the Liberal leadership was more outspoken. Herbert Asquith informed a meeting at Trowbridge that the Liberal party had remained patient in the months following the Raid, not because it believed that the Government had been 'uniformly either wise or adroit in its methods, but because they had been in complete sympathy with what they had understood to be its purpose and spirit'. Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes had indicated a 'falling off from the strong and consistent line which the Government had hitherto pursued'.¹¹⁹ A few days later Harcourt attacked Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes at Tredegar:

Is that the standard of honour by which an English statesman is to judge unlawful and dishonourable actions? What a picture to hold up to the world of the moral basis of the British Empire, of the principles upon which it is founded, of the greatness that it has acquired, and the spirit of the man by whom it is conducted!¹²⁰

Nevertheless, the Liberal response in Parliament was interpreted as an early indication that Opposition leaders would resist the calls of their backbenchers to deal harshly with Rhodes, and instead pursue a policy - advocated by the *Observer* among others - of national solidarity.¹²¹

XI

By the end of June Rhodes's position as Managing Director of the Chartered Company had become untenable. The crisis was brought to a head on 20 June when *The Times* published a despatch from the Transvaal Secretary of State to the Acting High Commissioner at

¹¹⁸ *Morning Post*, 11 May 1896, p.6.

¹¹⁹ *The Times*, 11 May 1896, p.5.

¹²⁰ *Morning Post*, 14 May 1896, p.3; also *The Times*, 14 May 1896, p.9.

¹²¹ *Observer*, 31 January 1897, p.4.

Cape Town. It called upon the Imperial Government to bring Rhodes and his fellow conspirators to trial for their role in the instigation of the failed coup. In addition, the Transvaal Secretary, Dr Leyds, requested that the administration of Rhodesia be taken out of the Chartered Company's hands and transferred to the Imperial Government.

The imperialist press received the despatches with palpable indignation. The *Daily Mail* railed against Leyds's 'insolent message', dismissed the Transvaal as a 'petty Republic', and challenged its right to dictate terms to the 'paramount power' in South Africa.¹²² Even the *Daily Chronicle* acknowledged the 'curt' tone of the Transvaal despatches, and expressed regret that they had not been 'more in harmony with diplomatic usage, and more in keeping with the respective positions of the two governments' concerned'.¹²³

Despite popular opposition to what the *Times* called the 'dictatorial manner' of Leyds's despatch, the intervention had the desired effect. Their resolve strengthened, Harcourt and the Liberal leadership began to press more vigorously for both the long-anticipated inquiry, and for action to be taken against Rhodes personally.¹²⁴ Finally, on 27 June 1896 *The Times* announced that on the previous day the Board of the Chartered Company had passed a resolution accepting Rhodes's resignation as Managing Director.¹²⁵

The consensus in the press was that Rhodes's resignation would be a demonstration of the Empire's good will to the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Transvaal, and that Rhodes's capacity to drive forward developments would not be materially damaged. Rhodes directed neither the civil nor the military administration of Rhodesia, consequently even among his staunchest supporters news of his resignation was greeted philosophically.

¹²² *Daily Mail*, 20 June 1896, p.4.

¹²³ *Daily Chronicle*, 20 June 1896, p.6.

¹²⁴ Butler, Jeffrey, *The Liberal Party and the Jameson Raid*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1968, p.98.

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 27 June 1896, p.13.

The Times insisted that resignation would not deny Rhodes his name, his wealth, or his influence.¹²⁶ The *Daily Mail* concurred; his resignation signalled little more than a tactical withdrawal. The controversies which had engulfed him personally were a threat to the charter; his resignation would serve as an admission of personal culpability while serving to relieve pressure on the Company itself. The journal concluded that Rhodes could now console himself with the 'knowledge that every stone thrown at him [would] no longer hit the company and its shareholders'.¹²⁷ There was also the acknowledgement that while Rhodes had rendered great service to the Empire, all men must be held accountable for their actions, only then might past services be recalled in mitigation.

The handling of the affair, however, left much to be desired. The indecision of the London Board had culminated in a farcical episode in which they had sought Rhodes's own opinion as to whether they ought to accept his resignation. This apparent willingness to defer to Rhodes in all things only succeeded in damaging the Company's credibility still further.

The *Daily News* expressed sympathy for the Board's predicament. Its members had been compelled to choose between the lesser of two evils: retaining Rhodes in his present position threatened the future of the charter, while accepting his resignation threatened to deprive them of their greatest asset.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, Edward Dicey, in a piece for the *Observer*, perceptively noted that it would have been preferable for Rhodes's resignation to have been accepted *before* it had been demanded by Kruger. His resignation, following so closely the despatches from the Transvaal Government betrayed weakness to the Empire's rivals.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Daily Mail*, 27 June 1896, p.4.

¹²⁸ *Daily News*, 27 June 1896, p.7 and p.6.

¹²⁹ *Observer*, 28 June 1896, p.4.

For Labouchere it was clear that the Company had only acquiesced in Rhodes's resignation in light of strong political pressure from the Colonial Secretary. When asked about this in the House of Commons Chamberlain would only answer by stating that on 24 June the Directors of the Company had informed him that they believed they ought to accept Rhodes's resignation, and that he had expressed agreement with their judgement.¹³⁰

In the wake of his resignation the Chartered Company confirmed that it had revoked the power of attorney given to Rhodes by the London Board. The plenary powers contained within the power of attorney had enabled Rhodes to manage the Company's affairs in South Africa at his absolute discretion.¹³¹ It was the final acknowledgement that his once great and dictatorial powers had been abrogated. The man who had effectively ruled South Africa from Cape Town a year earlier now found himself reliant upon mere influence to shape events.

XII

The trial of Dr Jameson and his officers began on 20 June 1896. The indictment contained twelve distinct counts; all framed upon section eleven subsections one and two of the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870.¹³² The proceedings lasted a little over a week and resulted in the defendants being found guilty. Jameson was sentenced to fifteen months imprisonment and his companions to terms varying between five and ten months. The strategy of the defence counsel had been to demonstrate that 'these admitted and undeniable actions did not constitute offences under the Foreign Enlistment Act'. As *The Times* acknowledged, 'some of the arguments relied upon for this purpose were of an exceedingly technical character'. They amounted to two

¹³⁰ HC Deb 30 June 1896, Vol. 42 c397; also *The Times*, 1 July 1896, p.8.

¹³¹ *The Times*, 8 July 1896, p.8; also 21 July 1896, p.6.

¹³² Foreign Enlistment Act (1870), Ch. 90. Vict. 33 and 34, Section 11.

distinct considerations: whether on the one hand the territory from whence the Raid had been launched fell within Her Majesty's territory, and on the other, whether considerations for the well-being of the citizens of Johannesburg warranted the intervention of an invasion force.

There was considerable public sympathy for Jameson, and as Jeffrey Butler has pointed out, 'The Government's evident fear of an acquittal was certainly justified.' In the event, 'the verdict was secured only by the browbeating of the jury by the Lord Chief Justice, who practically ordered them to convict'.¹³³ The jury was advised that it was not necessary for an expedition to actually begin, the offence having been committed when intent alone is clearly present. The Lord Chief Justice also made it clear to the jury that it was equally unlawful for any subject of the Queen to launch an attack from outside Her Majesty's Dominions. This succeeded in largely eradicating the arguments of technicality as to the locality of the defendants and whether they could be prosecuted by a British court. As *The Times* concluded: 'Applying these far reaching principles to the facts before them, the jury had no option but to find the defendants guilty...'¹³⁴

The Times accurately predicted that the verdict would 'commend itself to the general judgement of the country'. Jameson's popularity had not been substantially damaged by the revelation of the cyphered telegrams. If anything the revelations had shifted the blame on to Rhodes and his associates, strengthening the image of Jameson as the impulsive imperial hero who had acted rashly – but loyally – in the service of his friend and his country. The national consensus was that the raiders ought to be punished for their actions, but not unduly so. The *Pall Mall Gazette's* front page headline 'Fairly Measured' was indicative of national sentiment. The *Gazette* declared that there was not a man in the country who

¹³³ Butler, p.277.

¹³⁴ *The Times*, 29 July 1896, p.11.

desired to see Jameson and his men relieved of their responsibilities on the grounds of legal technicality, such as had been invoked in their defence. Nevertheless, there was, the journal detected, a real sense of regret that Jameson and his men should have warranted such a punishment.¹³⁵ Even Labouchere admitted to having 'signed with pleasure' a petition which would ultimately achieve the mitigation of the sentences handed down to Jameson and his officers to those of first-class misdemeanants. Labouchere insisted that regardless of motive, the raiders ought to be treated as political prisoners.¹³⁶

The primary concern of Rhodes's opponents was that Jameson would be made a scapegoat for his superiors - possibly accounting for the Liberal press's clemency towards Jameson personally - as Labouchere explained:

For my part, I should wish for the acquittal of Dr Jameson, and I think that is very likely to be the case. It would be a palpable proof of the injustice of dragging into Court Mr Rhodes' subordinates when he, the supreme chief, remains unmolested.¹³⁷

The *Daily Chronicle* agreed, referring to Jameson's trial as merely the 'first act of the drama', and insisting that Britain's responsibilities would not be discharged, nor the law vindicated, until both Rhodes and the Chartered Company had 'faced the footlights of public investigation'.¹³⁸

At the time of the initial verdict few challenged the clemency shown to Jameson and his officers. A notable exception was the Radical journal *Reynolds's Newspaper* which led with the provocative headline 'Hotel Life for the Raiders', and complained that the sentences further evidenced the proposition that there was one law for 'Society pets' such as Jameson, and one law for the common man. The journal's disgust that 'so-called Radicals' had joined the

¹³⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 July 1896, p.1.

¹³⁶ *Truth*, 6 August 1896, p.354.

¹³⁷ *Standard*, 1 July 1896, p.7.

¹³⁸ *Daily Chronicle*, 29 July 1896, p.7.

Conservatives in celebrating the commutation of the sentences, however, only serves to demonstrate the sense of broad satisfaction that justice had been done.¹³⁹

Unsurprisingly, this fragile coalition began to break down when Jameson was granted early release from prison on the grounds of ill-health. Labouchere complained that while he had 'no vindictive feeling' towards Jameson - believing him to be the 'deluded victim of a more astute conspirator' - he had 'played the game and lost', and must, therefore, 'pay the stakes'.¹⁴⁰

Aside from isolated voices of dissent concerning the foreshortening of his sentence, the overriding sentiment in the wake of Jameson's conviction was that justice had been served; English law and national honour had been vindicated. This, it was hoped, would send a clear signal to the Empire's rivals that the Imperial Government would not tolerate criminality for the sake of national aggrandisement, and to the subjects of the Empire, that British justice was steadfast and uncompromising. With the conclusion of the trial the last impediment to a British inquiry into the Jameson Raid and the administration of the Chartered Company was removed. This being so Rhodes's solicitor, Bouchier Hawksley, announced in *The Times* that he had written to the Solicitor to the Treasury informing him that Rhodes was ready to come to London and explain his actions.¹⁴¹

XIII

In the aftermath of the Jameson Raid a contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* pondered 'Whether it was the inception or the execution of Jameson's enterprise that attracted [the public's] admiration...' Had it been 'their simple appreciation of manhood, or their pugnacious

¹³⁹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 2 August 1896, p.1.

¹⁴⁰ *Truth*, 19 November 1896, p.1299.

¹⁴¹ *The Times*, 29 July 1896, p.11.

instinct that delights in conflict...' Or had they simply been 'carried away by the sensational reports that accompanied the first news...' In any case, there could be no mistaking that 'the English people undoubtedly warmly espoused the cause of the raiders...'¹⁴²

The obstinacy of the Boers, the injustices suffered by the Uitlanders, the threat of German imperialism, the imagined threat posed to the women and children of Johannesburg, in conjunction with the international climate, had conspired to turn what had been a colossal failure into a glorious defeat. At this time sympathy with the raiders appeared to be almost universal, as the *Liberal Speaker* reluctantly confirmed:

Society is almost as one man on the side of the mercenary adventurers...The mob of the streets is for once on the side of society, and the press – even to its shame the Liberal press – is largely in the hands of Mr Rhodes and his confederates.¹⁴³

In its attempt to rationalise Jameson's popularity the *Pall Mall Gazette* - perhaps more accurately than any other journal - captured the mood of the country when it wrote of this time:

The President of the United States had flouted us; we had not gained much glory at Constantinople; and the German Emperor's telegram was the finishing stroke. Everybody seemed inclined to go for us, and the British public were dying to get hold of somebody whom they might back against the world. Dr Jameson seemed to be just the man they wanted. The Poet Laureate and the Music Halls assisted in magnifying the legend, just as the Jacobite ballads had a great deal to do with the popularity of "Bonnie Prince Charlie."¹⁴⁴

There was considerable controversy over the degree to which Rhodes and his allies had manipulated public opinion in Britain in support of their own interests. The *Speaker* argued that the entire affair had been carefully choreographed by a powerful combination of London syndicates, 'Hebrew millionaires', and like-minded individuals

¹⁴² *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1896, pp.265-296 (p.266).

¹⁴³ *Speaker*, 15 February 1896, p.176.

¹⁴⁴ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 February 1896, p.1.

in politics and the press, who had worked in unison to present a heroic portrait of Jameson to the masses.¹⁴⁵

Suspicious concerning Rhodes's alleged mastery of the press were heightened at this time by a change of editor at the *Daily News*, widely regarded as the pre-eminent Liberal journal of the day. Its new editor, Edward Tyas Cook, was a staunch imperialist who had served with Stead on the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and in Labouchere's words, 'was thick and thin with Rhodes'.¹⁴⁶ Labouchere correctly interpreted the change as part of a broader Liberal defection to the imperialist cause, stating that the 'present orgy of Jingoism [was] due to the Liberal Party, under the dictation of Lord Roseberry, going over bag and baggage to the Jingo camp'.¹⁴⁷ The *Daily Chronicle* would later complain that the change had delivered the 'official organ of the Liberal party...into the hands of a man [Rhodes] whom a great number – perhaps the majority – of his countrymen regard with deep suspicion...'¹⁴⁸

The *Chronicle* conceded that Rhodes's influence in the press extended far beyond the editorship of the *Daily News*, noting that he was 'happy in possessing amongst his admirers many able writers whose devotion to his cause [was] unsparing'. The Jameson Raid crisis had been so expertly orchestrated that the journal could scarcely suppress its admiration:

The contributions of these publicists agreed with one another in a remarkable manner. If the key for the day or the week was to be the minor key no jarring note was heard. Whether it was the pianissimo allusions to the raid, or the swelling passages with Mr Rhodes and British interests in South Africa for motive, or the swinging fortissimo which has drowned everything else since the great German plot, the tone and time were faultless.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *Speaker*, 29 February 1896, p.228.

¹⁴⁶ *Truth*, 13 February 1896, p.388; also Koss, Stephen, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press*, Vol. 1, pp.362-368.

¹⁴⁷ *Truth*, 23 January 1896, p.206.

¹⁴⁸ *Daily Chronicle*, 25 February 1896, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

This manipulation of the press had allegedly enabled Rhodes to contain the fallout from the Raid, and frame both his actions and those of the raiders in the most favourable terms.

Popular support for the raiders did not necessarily mean ideological approval of Rhodes or government by Chartered Company, nor did it necessarily imply that Jameson had been justified in crossing the Transvaal border. Expressions of almost universal regret that Jameson had blundered into the Transvaal were transformed into what amounted to jingoistic enthusiasm once it became clear that imperial interests were at stake. As the journalist G.W. Steevens succinctly put it: 'There was not an Englishman but condemned Jameson as in the wrong; there was not an Englishman that did not involuntarily sympathise with him.'¹⁵⁰

On closer inspection it would appear that the British public's reaction to the Jameson Raid, and in particular the popular demonstrations afforded to both Rhodes and Jameson in-turn, owed more to the national enthusiasm for defending Imperial interests, than to any personal adoration for Jameson or Rhodes. This was certainly the view taken by the Liberal Unionist MP, H.O. Arnold-Forster who, in an article for the *National Review*, declared that 'the vast majority of the people of the United Kingdom...love the Chartered Company very little, and the Boers not at all, but...love their country and its traditions very much'. He insisted that commentators on both sides had been mistaken in their assessment of the Jameson Raid. It had been all too easy to confuse love of country with love of Rhodes; similarly, he felt that the Liberals had deluded themselves into believing that opposition to the Chartered Company necessarily meant sympathy for the Boers. 'Two-thirds' of the House of Commons, and 'nine-tenths' of the country, Arnold-Forster insisted, had no love for either party, but were concerned

¹⁵⁰ *New Review*, February 1896, p.182.

only with the well-being of the Empire, and the maintenance of British paramountcy in South Africa.¹⁵¹

In assessing the nation's appraisal of Rhodes at this time, Arnold-Forster admitted that if one was to take the balance of the British press, one would be forced to conclude 'that there was a unanimous feeling of admiration both for the institution and the man in all classes of English society'. The advocates of the Chartered Company were numerous and noisy in their support of Rhodes. As for his critics, there could be no question; they represented a very small minority indeed. Of this latter group Arnold-Forster wrote: 'The number of "Little Englanders" is small, so small as to be almost negligible, and the Party, such as it is, is diminishing.'¹⁵²

Rhodes's biographer, Robert I. Rotberg, has also argued that in Britain there was cross-party support for the removal of Kruger, and for the re-absorption of the Transvaal into the British Empire. Rotberg also concurs that this did not necessarily translate as political support for Rhodes per se, but more accurately as a desire to utilise his 'energy, capital, and strategic position...[A]s much as British statesman might align themselves with Rhodes, they were distinctly unprepared to do so publicly'.¹⁵³

A majority of the people had at times 'regretted and deplored' the tactics used by the Chartered Company on their behalf, and Jameson's Raid was no exception. However, there was an unwillingness to sacrifice Rhodes and the Chartered Company on the grounds of propriety - the stakes were too high. As Arnold-Forster explained:

...these facts do not prevent [the public] being staunch in defence of the legitimate ambitions of the nation; nor, because

¹⁵¹ *National Review*, June 1896, pp.516-530 (p.518).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Rotberg, pp.518-519.

some people have made a blunder, are they prepared to see their just rights withheld, or their just aspirations defeated.¹⁵⁴

This fact was tacitly admitted by the Liberal Opposition in their refusal to insist either upon the revocation of the charter or the prosecution of Rhodes.

In assessing the impact of the Raid upon Rhodes's career, much of the Imperialist press remained optimistic. In the short-term at least, his resignation as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony would enable him to dedicate more time to the development of Rhodesia. Rhodes's task was to build a second Johannesburg, draw the disaffected inhabitants of the Transvaal to Rhodesia and create an 'imperial counterpoise'.¹⁵⁵

Rhodes's supporters questioned who would choose tyranny in the Transvaal over freedom in Rhodesia, and continued to write encouragingly of the colony's prospects. It was also hoped that the Raid would bring Kruger to his senses by demonstrating that Britain was in earnest, and thereby compel the Transvaal President to recognise the rights of the Uitlanders.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, in spite of his resignation and the loss of his political base, Rhodes was expected to retain an influential role in shaping the future of South Africa.

Others were less optimistic. Critics argued that the Raid had strained Britain's relations with her European neighbours - particularly Germany - forcing the Imperial Government on to a war footing which would lead to increased military expenditure in defence of imperial interests. It had inflamed relations between the two principal white races in South Africa; it had set back the process of peaceful unification - perhaps indefinitely - and had derailed the Uitlander's campaign for civil rights. Moreover, it was already apparent in certain quarters that the Raid had placed the Empire on a collision course with the Transvaal. Describing the effect of the

¹⁵⁴ *National Review*, June 1896, pp.516-530 (p.517).

¹⁵⁵ *The Times*, 10 February 1896, p.7.

¹⁵⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, March 1896, pp.483-494.

Jameson Raid on Kruger the former Secretary of State for the Colonies Sydney Buxton would later write:

The Raid strengthened his hands and hardened his heart. The continuation of the grievances in their crudest form resulted in the antipathetic and abortive Conference between President Kruger and Lord Milner, and finally led to the South African War.¹⁵⁷

In regard to Rhodes's own position the same critics offered a similarly inauspicious prognosis; even his admirer, and future biographer, John Verschoyle acknowledged:

It leaves him – a pathetic figure – shorn of his practically despotic political power, the whole fabric of his lifework in politics actually in ruins, detested by the Cape Dutch, whom he had won completely, and who a few weeks ago trusted him implicitly.¹⁵⁸

The Raid had called into question Rhodes's reputation as a statesman; he had placed his trust in undependable men which had betrayed a severe lack of judgement. In common with supporters elsewhere in the Imperialist press, however, Verschoyle predicted that Rhodes would rise again, and 'Antaeus like' gain strength from his fall. He was still a young man; there was still time to rebuild his shattered career. In the meantime, Rhodes's presence in the country he had founded would 'centuple the speed' at which it would be developed. Only when Rhodesia had been made an unqualified success and when the Chartered Company began to pay dividends, could he expect to return to Britain and receive 'the national recognition of his great abilities and unique services'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 'The Jameson Raid', by Earl Buxton, Vol. 30 No. 119, April 1931, pp.113-118 (p.114).

¹⁵⁸ *Fortnightly Review*, March 1896, pp.483-494 (p.493).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*: p.493.

Chapter 6

'The Necessary Man?'

Rhodes, Rebellion, and the Recovery of a Colonial Reputation

The Matabele Rebellion which began in March 1896 threatened to deliver a deathblow to the Chartered Company's administration in Rhodesia. When Rhodes's complicity in the Jameson Raid became public knowledge two months later, responsibility for the twin disasters appeared likely to fall squarely upon his shoulders. How Rhodes's reputation not only survived, but was to an extent enhanced by these events forms the basis of the present chapter.

On 27 March 1896 *The Times* reported that the Ndebele had revolted in the Insiza and Filabusi districts of Matabeleland, and that a number of white settlers had been massacred.¹ By the end of the month there was scarcely a European left alive in the outlying districts; the settlers having fled for safety to the hastily established laagers at Bulawayo, Gwelo, Belingwe and Tuli.² Had the Ndebele concentrated their efforts on these major settlements in the first instance, it is likely that the European population would have been overwhelmed. The delay proved critical to the survival of the European population in Rhodesia, and enabled the latter to form defensive laagers from which they could mobilise and await reinforcements.

Ndebele resentment pre-dated the war of 1893, and can be traced to the disingenuous manner in which Rhodes and his associates had procured the charter in 1888. In the years following the occupation the Company struggled to establish an affective administration, leading to the abuse of power by its servants. When relations between the Company and the Ndebele inevitably broke down in the

¹ *The Times*, 27 March 1896, p.5.

² Ranger, T.O. *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-1897*, Heinemann London 1979, p.127.

summer of 1893, the latter believed they had been manoeuvred into war.

Following the cessation of hostilities a Land commission was established to provide for the equitable distribution of land and cattle for African use. Between 1894 and 1895 the history of the Company's administration was the story of how these provisions were flouted and eroded.³ The rich agricultural lands upon which the Ndebele resided were parcelled up and awarded to veterans, or sold to British investors. The Ndebele were effectively banished to the north of the country, while the allotted reserves proved unfit for settlement. Cattle, which were of economic, spiritual and cultural significance to the Ndebele, were expropriated to volunteers as 'spoils of war', or sold at auction with the proceeds being used for monetary payments instead.⁴ The number of cattle left in Ndebele hands after the redistribution was a fraction of the pre-war numbers. This sense of loss was compounded still further by the rinderpest cattle disease which decimated the remaining herds, which in conjunction with severe droughts and plagues of locusts, served to persuade the superstitious Africans that the European settlers were themselves the harbingers of misfortune. Faced with this unprecedented intrusion, and unable to preserve their traditional way of life within the framework of the Company's new administration, the Ndebele spied in the defeat of Jameson and the white police an opportunity to regain their former position.

II

The British press offered a variety of explanations as to the causes of the rebellion, few, however, blamed Rhodes or the Company directly. The timing of the rebellion was popularly attributed to Jameson's absence – what *The Times* called the 'defensive dislocation of the

³ Ibid: p.101.

⁴ Ibid: p.109.

country'.⁵ In certain quarters this led to the inference that the Imperial Government was to blame for having detained Jameson in London. W.T. Stead typified this belief when he noted: 'It does seem a supreme farce that we should be trying at Bow Street the very man whose presence is so greatly needed in Rhodesia.'⁶ Stead facetiously recommended that the Judge grant Jameson a leave of absence that he might return to Rhodesia and pacify the country before returning to Britain to receive his 'reward in the police court and the Old Bailey'.⁷ To an extent this interpretation bolstered the reputations of Rhodes and Jameson by presenting them as indispensable agents in the peaceful development of the territory.

Support for the Company's administration emanated once more from the missionary fraternity, which was eager to consolidate its gains within the framework of Company rule. The Bishop of Mashonaland, Dr William Thomas Gaul, identified the influence of African witchdoctors and the Ndebele's natural aversion to labour as the principal causes of the crisis. In spite of this setback Gaul insisted that the influence of the missionary, combined with the discipline of labour, regular wages, and the protection of life and property created by the Company's administration, would yet render 'the native races a valuable and important element in the social and industrial life of South Africa'.⁸

In an interview with *The Times*, Rev. Charles Helm of the LMS – who had translated the terms of the Rudd Concession to Lobengula – told *The Times* of the 'wonderful change' which had been effected in the Ndebele since the war. Helm identified the cattle issue as a likely cause of the rebellion, and though he conceded that the actions of certain 'irresponsible whites' were to a 'larger degree' responsible, he was careful to shield Rhodes and the Company hierarchy. Helm concluded: 'There can be no doubt that, as a whole, and except in a

⁵ *The Times*, 1 April 1896, p.9.

⁶ *Review of Reviews*, April 1896, p.295.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *The Times*, 3 April 1896, p.8.

few minor details, the native condition has been greatly improved under the regime of the Chartered Company.⁹

Support of this nature did much to counteract the charges of the Company's perennial critics. As usual Labouchere was in the vanguard, attributing the rebellion to the theft of Ndebele cattle, and to their cruel treatment at the hands of Company officials. Far from affecting any improvement in the condition of the indigenous peoples, Labouchere insisted that the Company had plumbed new depths of barbarism, and urged those who equated imperialism in Africa with the march of civilization to temper their expectations, writing of the Ndebele:

They are savages, but nothing that they can do can exceed in cruelty the mode in which they have been treated by civilised men...The record of the doings of the Company towards the natives has been a black page in the history of our country.¹⁰

Between those who cited the Company's wanton cruelty on the one hand, and those who blamed the unwillingness of the Ndebele to acquit themselves to the mores of civilization on the other, there were even-handed and insightful observations. One such account was rendered by William Fairbridge, editor of the *Rhodesian Herald*. Writing in the *National Review*, Fairbridge identified several causal factors, including the want of a strong 'native' department under a 'first class' magistrate experienced in dealing with African affairs, an effective police force - numbers having been drastically reduced on the grounds of economic necessity, and only augmented in 1895 to reinforce Jameson's position on the Transvaal border – and the attempt to administer too large a territory with too little working capital and administrative caution.¹¹

⁹ Ibid: 2 April 1896, p.6.

¹⁰ *Truth*, 2 July 1896, pp.22-23.

¹¹ *National Review*, March 1897, pp.30-41.

III

The Imperial Government's restrictions on military mobilization in Rhodesia and the existing tensions between the Company, the Imperial Government, and the Transvaal did much to impede the initial response to the rebellion. By the time of Rhodes's arrival the position of the whites had markedly improved; however, the gravity of the situation had necessitated the intervention of imperial troops. The concentration of whites at Bulawayo eased concerns that the settlement would be overrun, and provided a base from which to conduct operations against the enemy. The most significant of these occurred on 6 June on the Umguza River, when the chosen men of eight Ndebele regiments were heavily defeated by a white patrol. In light of this defeat the Ndebele abandoned their offensive strategy and fell back on two defensive strongholds, Taba Zi Ka Mambo, and the Matopos Hills.

Throughout June and July 1896 Rhodes accompanied a flying column of white troops and participated in their battles as they sought to pacify the country. Reports of Rhodes's heroism were largely conveyed through *Reuters* or the *Central News* agency and received a wide circulation in Britain. Having placed Rhodes firmly at the centre of the action they created a lasting impression in the public mind that Rhodes was bearing the hardships of the fighting alongside his men. During the assault on the rebel stronghold at Taba Zi Ka Mambo, a widely published telegram from the *Central News* agency stated:

...Mr Rhodes, refusing arms, simply carried a switch. The officers throughout the hostilities had fears for his safety, as his daring led him into very exposed positions. Once the ex-Cape Minister got into an exceedingly hot corner, and sang out "Jove, they are close!"¹²

In other reports Rhodes was portrayed delivering stirring speeches to the troops, distributing rations, and directing logistics.

¹² *Standard*, 11 July 1896, p.7.

His dramatic reply to Chamberlain when pressed on the subject of his resignation had been a publicists dream: 'Let resignation wait, tomorrow we fight the Matabele.' As one of Rhodes's later biographers observed: Few men understood better than Rhodes what a powerful hold the idea of self-sacrifice has over men's imaginations. He remembered that 'martyrdom' on the steps of the Khartoum residency had secured General Gordon a permanent place in the pantheon of British heroes and inspired his countrymen to reconquer the Sudan in his name.¹³ It was this same spirit which animated Rhodes now, at the moment when the great work to which he had dedicated his life appeared threatened with destruction.

For his opponents in Britain the rebellion showed worrying signs of affording Rhodes the kind of publicity he could only have dreamt of in the weeks leading up to his resignation. Labouchere had long insisted that Rhodes's reputation had been carefully choreographed, creating in the public mind a 'mythical Rhodes', who was to be portrayed as 'the noblest, the purest, and the least self-seeking of patriots'. Of Rhodes's latest heroics Labouchere complained:

Just now an attempt is being made to create another myth. Mr Rhodes, we are asked to believe, is now atoning for any errors that he may have committed by risking his life in desperate combat against the Matabele. It is evident that, whilst the Matabele may occasionally be able to kill some isolated Europeans, a battle with them is about as dangerous to all except themselves as is pheasant-shooting to battue-sportsmen.¹⁴

Press reports declaring that Rhodes had been urged by his companions to 'moderate his valour', were evidently a source of great amusement to Labouchere, as were the seemingly incongruous reports that the hero of the hour was often without arms. Labouchere dryly remarked that Rhodes had 'fought well, armed only with a switch!' Scornfully concluding, 'was there ever such a hero?'¹⁵

¹³ Thomas, pp.311-312.

¹⁴ *Truth*, 21 May 1896, p.1275.

¹⁵ *Ibid*: 16 July 1896, p.150; and 23 July 1896, p.221.

The *Manchester Guardian* explained to its readers that while the Jameson Raid had 'damaged' Rhodes's reputation, the cyphered telegrams had 'shattered' it. Faced with this predicament, the journal insisted that Rhodes had returned to South Africa in-order that he might 'earn a second character in the place of that which he had lost'. With his supporters in 'virtual control of almost every channel of publicity', Rhodes was being portrayed as the Empire's 'necessary man'.¹⁶

Unbeknownst to his opponents in the Liberal press, reports of Rhodes's heroism in the field were building towards a remarkable crescendo, as he stood poised to add to his impressive list of career titles that of peacemaker.

To break the stalemate between the British forces and the Ndebele rebels ensconced in the Matopos Hills, Rhodes sought to initiate peace talks with *his* African subjects. With the Shona having followed their former overlords into armed revolt, Rhodes understood that the Chartered Company could not endure the cost of a protracted conflict; he also recognised the importance of restoring peace to Rhodesia before facing the Jameson Raid inquiry in London.

Fearing an ambush the rebels would not countenance leaving their mountain stronghold and instead requested that Rhodes venture unarmed into the hills to meet them. Rhodes agreed, and with only three whites, and a couple of African scouts, set out for the Ndebele stronghold. At the resulting indaba Rhodes listened patiently to the grievances of the Ndebele chiefs and assured them that he would address their concerns directly. It would take a further three indabas, and a series of diplomatic meetings for the achievement of peace in Matabeleland; however, Rhodes would be publicly acclaimed for having taken the crucial first step. In later years his

¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 August 1896, p.4.

biographers would refer to this event as 'his moment of grace',¹⁷ 'his finest hour'.¹⁸

In Britain Rhodes's actions earned him instant acclaim. 'Mr Rhodes', *The Times* reported, 'is to be congratulated on a considerable step towards the pacification of the country that bears his name, which has been brought about largely through his personal coolness, judgement, and tact.'¹⁹ In acknowledging the wider significance of the indaba the *Pall Mall Gazette* noted:

...there will certainly be a rather good sort of halo round his head when he comes over to face the music. Whatever the score against Mr Rhodes may turn out to be, his plucky little trip into the Matoppos wipes out some of it.²⁰

The *Daily News* quoted a Rhodes confidant as having said: 'What he has got to do, is to get wounded...If the Matabele won't do it, he ought to do it himself with a penknife.' If any quality could rival physical courage and self-sacrifice in the Victorian mind, it was the demonstration of that most essential of imperial qualities – moral superiority. Reflecting upon the significance of Rhodes's indaba, the *Morning Post* concluded that 'nothing so impresses a native as the moral strength of his adversary...'²¹

The indaba had served to strengthen Rhodes's personal hold over the territory named in his honour. As the *Morning Post* explained, the indaba had 'given evidence not only of his influence but of his personal courage – a quality which [was] likely to commend itself to the Matabele as well as to his fellow countrymen'. No other white man could now hope to assume the patriarchal role Rhodes had assumed among the Ndebele.²² The *Daily Mail* argued that the indaba bore witness to 'the enormous power which a name and an individuality has in an unsettled country and amongst a savage

¹⁷ Thomas, p.314.

¹⁸ Flint, p.205, also Rotberg, p.690.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 24 August 1896, p.7.

²⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 August 1896, p.2.

²¹ *Morning Post*, 3 September 1896, p.4.

²² *Ibid*: 25 August 1896, p.4.

people...The lesson of the rising and the lesson of its settlement are one', the journal argued, Rhodes, whose 'personal influence...ha[d] hitherto guaranteed the progress and security of both British and native races should be allowed to continue [his] pacific work'.²³

When the Radical journal *Reynolds's Newspaper* complained that autumn that Rhodes had been 'wandering about the Matabele country, at a safe distance from Matabele bullets', 'holding palavers with the natives', and 'settling terms of a patch-up peace in the interest of stock Exchange movements and combinations', it reflected the views of a vociferous minority.²⁴ To criticise Rhodes at this juncture proved problematical to his critics in both Parliament and the press. As Chamberlain admitted, it would have been absurd to criticise Rhodes for of all things leniency; for having adopting a humanitarian position and bringing about a peaceful cessation to hostilities. The Liberal MP Philip Stanhope had urged such a course in Parliament,²⁵ while Labouchere had called for an amnesty in *Truth*, and in July had implored the Colonial Office to open talks with the rebels.²⁶ It proved a difficult task to criticise Rhodes for having followed their advice.

Rhodes's achievement was confirmed on 13 October when the rebel leaders surrendered. By November General Carrington, commander of the British forces in Rhodesia, had declared the war to be at an end. In addition, the administrative reforms the Company intended to implement were met with broad approval. The indunas were to be restored to a position of authority and be responsible for maintaining order among their people, while the native commissioner's - whose districts were to be co-terminus with the tribal areas - were to act as the medium between the Government and the Africans, and between the employers of labour and the

²³ *Daily Mail*, 24 August 1896, p.4.

²⁴ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 11 November 1896, p.2.

²⁵ HC Deb, 11 June 1896, Vol. 41 c840.

²⁶ *Truth*, 16 July 1896, p.149.

indunas.²⁷ With such reforms in place, wrote the *Pall Mall Gazette*, it was hoped that all would be 'peace and plenty in the good time coming'.²⁸

Rhodes's reputation was further enhanced by two separate accounts of the rebellion which were published in quick succession. The first was written by F.C. Selous, the man Rhodes had employed to lead the pioneers into Mashonaland in 1890,²⁹ and the second was by a veteran of the campaign, and an acquaintance of Rhodes's, Robert Baden-Powell.³⁰ As to the causes of the rebellion there was considerable consensus. Both men stressed the natural resentment of a subjugated people to their conquerors. Both contrasted the European's love of civilisation with the African's alleged abhorrence of all forms of settled government. Both men attributed the timing of the rising to the absence of Jameson's forces. And both rejected the notion that the rebellion had been a popular movement occasioned by white oppression.³¹

Rhodes's supporters welcomed Selous' account in particular. He refuted the notion that Rhodes's heroism had been exaggerated, directing critics to the appendix of his book where he had meticulously listed the European casualties. Selous insisted that Rhodes enjoyed the confidence of all the inhabitants of Rhodesia - black and white, British and Dutch - and stressed that had it not been for 'his influence and the strength of his personality peace would have been impossible'.³²

In tacitly acknowledging the propaganda value of Selous' account, *The Times* reported: '...we are much mistaken if...the average reader will not lay down the book with a warmer feeling of regard and

²⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 November 1896, p.1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Selous, Frederick Courteney, *Sunshine and Storm in Rhodesia*, Rowland Ward and Co. Ltd., London, 1896.

³⁰ Baden-Powell, R.S.S, *The Matabele Campaign, 1896*, Methuen and Co. London 1897.

³¹ Baden-Powell, pp.24-42; Selous, pp.viii-xix, also pp.51-52.

³² Selous, pp.258-259.

respect for the colonists of Rhodesia than he has ever entertained before'.³³ The *Morning Post* disingenuously referred to Selous as an 'independent critic', who had conclusively demonstrated that the accusations of 'systematic brutality' towards Africans on the part of the Company were 'entirely unfounded'.³⁴

Selous' sentiments coincided with those of the Company's new administrator in Rhodesia, Earl Grey, who ensured that his own assessment of Rhodes's performance - contained within a letter to the Company's Board - received maximum attention from the press. Grey wrote of the 'immense services' Rhodes had rendered, and of his 'characteristic tenacity' in bringing the rebellion to a peaceful conclusion.³⁵

The degree to which the rebellion and its aftermath had assisted in the rehabilitation of Rhodes's reputation was given material expression when, at a meeting of Chartered shareholders, the Company's capital was increased to £3,500,000. Rhodes's name had been received with loud and prolonged cheers, a clear indication, the *Morning Post* concluded, that the country 'fully appreciated' his work in South Africa.³⁶

IV

In the final weeks of 1896 Rhodes embarked upon what amounted to a triumphal progress through Rhodesia and the Cape Colony en-route to the London inquiry. There is a consensus among Rhodes's biographers that his decision to undertake this trip - and thus leave South Africa via Cape Town rather than sailing north from Beira - was made in the knowledge that an enthusiastic reception would serve as a timely reminder to both public opinion, and the political

³³ *The Times*, 5 November 1896, p.11.

³⁴ *Morning Post*, 5 November 1896, p.6.

³⁵ *The Times*, 28 November 1896, p.2.

³⁶ *Morning Post*, 7 November 1896, p.8. See also, *Ibid*: p.4.

establishment in Britain that he still commanded immense support among his fellow colonists.

Rhodes remained a divisive figure, and the notion of affording him a civic reception provoked controversy at the Cape. To his supporters he was an imperial hero, who had taken his share in the fighting in the north, and whose courage and personal initiative had brought the rebellion to a peaceful conclusion. To the English-speaking community Rhodes was a potential leader who could defy the political dominance of the Bond. He was also viewed favourably by those who contrasted the Transvaal's isolationist and protectionist stance with Rhodes's development of the north, and those who concluded that the Cape's interests might be better served through an alliance with Rhodesia.

To Rhodes's critics on the other hand, his involvement in the Raid had brought the country to the brink of civil war. At a time when the maintenance of friendly relations with the Transvaal was deemed to be of the utmost importance, many questioned the wisdom of acclaiming a man the Kruger Government had so recently declared an enemy of the state.

In the event, Rhodes's arrival at Port Elizabeth was marked by what was popularly believed to be the biggest demonstration the town had ever known. His carriage was drawn through streets lined with cheering crowds to the market square where, before an enormous concourse of people, he received congratulatory addresses from civic dignitaries for his role in suppressing the rebellion.³⁷

It was during a speech at Port Elizabeth that Rhodes infamously informed the crowd that he was returning to Britain to face the 'unctuous rectitude' of his countrymen. Rhodes's sentiments, while finding favour with his colonial audience, were received with

³⁷ *Morning Post*, 25 December 1896, p.4.

predictably less enthusiasm in Britain. It was his first false step on what was to prove a controversial tour.

The prevailing response to Rhodes's comments in Britain was one of indignation. *The Times* accused him of having thrown a 'slur upon the moral judgement of the nation',³⁸ while the *Daily News*, having conceded the national tendency towards 'unctuousness', counselled that in the future it would be better both 'for him, and for the causes he has at heart, if he were not quite so contemptuous of the rectitude'.³⁹ The *Pall Mall Gazette*, meanwhile, accurately maintained that the overriding response of the British people to Rhodes's controversies, far from being that of 'unctuous rectitude', had been to wish him well but ultimately to suspend their judgement:

...the people of this country have said nothing definite about Mr Rhodes yet. If he comes triumphantly out if it all, we shall be the first to give three cheers, and just one cheer more; but at present we have an old-fashioned prejudice in favour of waiting for the verdict.⁴⁰

The climax of the tour was Cape Town itself where, according to Rhodes's private secretary, Philip Jourdan: 'The people went almost wild with excitement.' Jourdan added that 'No royal personage could have wished for a more affectionate welcome than was accorded Rhodes.'⁴¹

V

The question most repeatedly asked in Britain concerned the authenticity of the demonstrations as a reliable indication of Rhodes's continuing support. Had they been a sincere demonstration of the esteem with which Rhodes was held by his fellow colonists, or a carefully choreographed publicity stunt designed to persuade those

³⁸ *The Times*, 4 January 1897, p.7.

³⁹ *Daily News*, 26 December 1896, p.4.

⁴⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 December 1896, p.2.

⁴¹ Jourdan, Philip, *Cecil Rhodes: His Private Life by His Private Secretary*, John Lane Co. London, 1911, p.52.

at home that in spite of his recent trials his influence in South Africa remained undiminished. As *The Times* acknowledged: 'It is difficult at this distance to estimate the exact value of a popular demonstration',⁴² and yet we must try.

The impression given by contemporary observers is almost unanimous in the assertion that the support was sincere; however, many of those observers were directly or indirectly affiliated to Rhodes. Baden-Powell, for example, who had accompanied Rhodes to Cape Town, was certain that the scenes he had witnessed reflected the genuine affection of the colonists for their former chief:

...the genuineness of the feeling towards Rhodes was unmistakable and impressive. It was not a got-up welcome, but a spontaneous burst of enthusiasm, in a place that formerly was distinctly hostile to him.⁴³

The consensus among British journals was that Rhodes's resurgent popularity with his fellow colonists stemmed from his commitment to the development of Rhodesia, his determination to extend the railways from the Cape and from the east coast, and his desire to make Cape Colony the dominant state in South Africa.⁴⁴ Rhodes's determination to develop Rhodesia, and connect the Cape to Bulawayo by rail was an endeavour with which both the British and Dutch inhabitants of the Cape could sympathise. It was a policy which must have succeeded, according to the *Morning Post*, of having 'awakened fresh feelings of friendship for the man who has added a country two thousand miles long and one thousand broad to the British Empire'.⁴⁵ The *Manchester Guardian* disapprovingly concurred:

There can be no question...that the strongest card played by Mr Rhodes is to be found in his promise to make the Cape Colony the dominant factor in South Africa. That is a policy which precisely suits the ideas of Cape colonists, who have

⁴² *The Times*, 26 December 1896, p.7.

⁴³ Baden-Powell, p.495.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 26 December 1896, p.7.

⁴⁵ *Morning Post*, 28 December 1896, p.4.

been continually endeavouring to benefit themselves at the expense of their neighbours.⁴⁶

Rhodes's friendly overtures to the Cape contrasted favourably with Kruger's protectionist policies in the Transvaal, and his nursing of the Delagoa Bay line to the east coast which threatened the trade and prosperity of the colony.

Mordechai Tamarkin has concluded that the Cape receptions proved more damaging to Rhodes's relationship with the Cape Afrikaners than the Jameson Raid itself. This can partly be attributed to what Rhodes had said in his speeches. His reference to 'not appealing to caucuses in future but to the electorate', inferred not only a break with the Bond but that in future Rhodes would seek to court the support of the 'English-speaking, pro-imperialist electorate'.⁴⁷ Rhodes's grandstanding had also offended Afrikaner sensibilities, and succeeded in provoking a backlash against him. It is possible to corroborate this view by considering the matter from the British perspective.

Amid the expressions of satisfaction that he appeared to have recovered his former influence at the Cape, the more perceptive commentators in Britain discerned an element of danger in Rhodes's triumphalism. There was the realisation that the ire of both the Bond and the Afrikaner republics might, if skilfully manipulated, be employed to exacerbate racial divisions throughout South Africa.

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, adopting a more censorious tone under its new editor, Douglas Straight, rebuked Rhodes for what it termed his 'bank-holiday expansiveness' at the Cape, stating in regard to the alleged achievement of Afrikaner conciliation that they would rather take the word of the Bond's leader, Jan Hofmeyr, for this than that of Rhodes. 'If Mr Rhodes wishes to recover his hold on the popular

⁴⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 December 1896, p.8.

⁴⁷ Tamarkin, Mordechai, *Cecil Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1996, pp.259-260.

affections, he should proceed by sounder methods than bumptious declarations and vainglorious biography', the *Gazette* scolded.⁴⁸

This theme was expanded upon by the *Manchester Guardian's* South African contributor, who argued that in attempting to secure the dominance of the Cape Colony, Rhodes would succeed in forever alienating the Boer republics. Only with the interference of the Imperial Government, the author warned, could the Cape Colony possibly attain the status ascribed to it by Rhodes. His reception at the Cape was considered a pyrrhic victory, it marked the continuation of a policy designed to benefit the Cape Colony at the expense of neighbouring states, and the result in the long-term would be 'bitterness and division'.⁴⁹ The journal's London correspondent detected a growing sense of alarm that Rhodes had soothed his vanity at the expense of the national interest, and that the receptions held in his honour had provoked a backlash of Afrikaner nationalism.⁵⁰

A further criticism was the notion that the receptions were being employed as a means to bully the mother country into accepting Rhodes's indispensability to the imperial cause before the inquiry into the Raid could be held in London. The *Manchester Guardian* accused Rhodes of seeking a 'popular verdict', and warned that such brazen opportunism would be unlikely to appeal to his countrymen:

Mr Rhodes should know that the British public does not take kindly to being bullied, and the suspicion that some such intention may underlie these Cape demonstrations is beginning slowly to take shape. If such an impression gains ground the effect is likely to be very different from that anticipated.⁵¹

Elsewhere in the Radical press Rhodes's grandstanding was interpreted as yet another veiled threat against imperial hegemony. His emphasis upon South African unity was once again

⁴⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 January 1897, p.1.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 December 1896, p.8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*: 4 January 1897, p.4.

⁵¹ *Ibid*: 2 January 1897, p.4.

misinterpreted as a desire to exclude the 'imperial factor'. The *Daily Chronicle* was among those to detect a 'bullying' undertone in Rhodes's speeches. 'Not Great Britain, he seems to say, but the "Cape Colony", must be the dominant Power south of central Africa', was the *Chronicle's* interpretation of Rhodes's commitment to South African federation.⁵²

Accusations of grandstanding were by no means limited to the Liberal press. The imperialist *Standard*, having accused Rhodes of 'laying himself out for ovations', remarked that he had shown a 'remarkable indifference' to the feelings of the Boers.⁵³ Leopold Maxse, editor of the Conservative *National Review* was even more forthright in his assessment:

His latest declarations are calculated to do nothing except to stir up ill-will between the two white races which have made South Africa their home, and, with his contemptuous and scarcely-veiled menaces towards the Imperial Government, tend to create a critical condition in South Africa...For ourselves we frankly confess to distrusting Mr Rhodes: we dislike his eternal vulgar swagger about his territorial achievements as though he had invented the British Empire; we detest his system of corrupting and degrading men, and we doubt his loyalty to the Empire. We feel that he is the wrong horse to back in South Africa.⁵⁴

Such concerns appeared justified when Eduard Jorrisen, the former Attorney-General of the Transvaal and a serving Supreme Court Judge, took the occasion of the customary New Year's Day greetings to President Kruger at Pretoria to register the most forthright objection yet against the receptions. Jorrisen expressed alarm that Rhodes - 'The chief criminal' of the Jameson Raid - had been feted during a triumphal progress through the Colony. '...he is glorified as the hero of the day', Jorrisen complained, 'and even more

⁵² *Daily Chronicle*, 28 December 1896, p.4.

⁵³ *Standard*, 1 January 1897, p.4.

⁵⁴ *National Review*, February 1897, pp.735-736.

as the hero of the morrow...’ The receptions, he declared, were an insult to the Transvaal.⁵⁵

As Tamarkin has demonstrated this, and similar responses from the Transvaal, ‘urged on the Cape Bond zealots’ to take action. Jorrisen’s sentiments acted as a rallying cry to Afrikaners at the Cape to forget their former loyalties to Rhodes and demonstrate the ‘racial’ solidarity urged for by the Transvaal leadership.

This movement appears to have originated in the Transvaal, before being adopted by Cape-Afrikaners who were desirous of ‘purifying’ the Bond of Rhodes and his admirers. While Tamarkin has suggested that the ‘*contra stem*’ was largely a grass roots response rather than an organised and centrally guided and directed movement’, he acknowledges that ‘The Bond press again played a vital role in alerting Cape Afrikaners to their political duty.’⁵⁶

At the centre of the Afrikaner counter-demonstration was the Dutch *Ons Land* newspaper of Cape Town. It encouraged readers not merely to write letters of complaint to the press, but to send resolutions to the High Commissioner and hold protest meetings where they might declare their opposition publicly.⁵⁷ Rhodes’s (predominantly) Afrikaner opponents in South Africa deemed it necessary to rally a visible opposition to the Cape receptions lest they be interpreted as a unanimous expression of support for Rhodes. It was not inconceivable that such an impression would have a bearing on the attitudes of the South Africa committee in London toward the accused, and future imperial policy.

The desired result was achieved, and in the weeks following Jorrisen’s speech an estimated thirty five so-called ‘anti-Rhodes’ meetings were held across the Cape.⁵⁸ The resolution passed at

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 4 January 1897, p.3.

⁵⁶ Tamarkin, pp.257-267.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*: p.261.

⁵⁸ The meetings at Stellenbosch, Piquetberg (Piketberg), Paarl, and Malmesbury received particular attention in the British press.

Paarl by a 'very large majority' may be taken as representative of the sentiments expressed. In deprecating the demonstrations the resolution declared that its stated purpose was to disabuse 'Africa and the world, and especially Great Britain...' that a majority of the population had lent its support to Rhodes.⁵⁹

The meetings were well attended and resolutions were duly passed, however, the solidarity of opposition that the Republics and their sympathisers at the Cape might have anticipated was not always in evidence.⁶⁰ Tamarkin characterised the protests at Stellenbosh as 'lacking in zeal and determination', 'gentle and moderate', and as 'lukewarm'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, by early February the *Ons Land* could note with satisfaction that more than a hundred such meetings had been held across the Colony.⁶²

For his critics in the press the protest meetings held throughout January were a clear indication that Rhodes had lost the crucial support of the Cape Afrikaners. The *Manchester Guardian's* South African contributor believed that Afrikaner animosity towards Rhodes was so strong that if offered the choice between another Rhodes Ministry and separation from the Empire, the Afrikaners of the Cape would adopt the latter course.⁶³ In this context Rhodes was once more portrayed as the divisive element in South Africa and not as its conciliator.

Evidence suggests that the contra stem may have been as contrived as the original receptions. At the first protest meetings news agencies noted the presence of men they proceeded to describe as 'Transvaal military agents' or as 'emissaries' from the

⁵⁹ *The Times*, 13 January 1897, p.3.

⁶⁰ The meeting of four hundred farmers at Malmesbury was a case in point. The address of Dr C.P. Smuts calling upon the meeting to condemn the Rhodes demonstrations received a decidedly mixed response. According to a *Reuters'* correspondent the calls of condemnation were mixed with those of Dutch participants unwilling to forget or ignore Rhodes's past services to the Colony. See *Manchester Guardian*, 22 January 1897, p.6.

⁶¹ Tamarkin, p.262.

⁶² *Ons Land*, 6 February 1897, quoted in Tamarkin p.262.

⁶³ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1897, p.10.

Boer republics. The purpose of these 'emissaries' was allegedly to 'foster ill-feeling' towards Rhodes and, where necessary, to suppress those Afrikaners inclined to speak in his favour. A correspondent for the *Central News Agency* insisted that the infiltration was part of a wider charm offensive orchestrated by the Boer republics to conciliate the Afrikaner element at the Cape, which allegedly included the promise of liberal tariffs if they would denounce Rhodes.⁶⁴ The *Daily Mail's* correspondent at Cape Town concurred, and conveyed the sentiments of a 'Dutch daily newspaper' (probably the *Het Dagblad*), which stated that the number of Paarl residents at the protest meeting did not exceed two hundred, concluding that 'The rest of the audience were from the outside districts far and near, even the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.'⁶⁵

In an interview with *Reuters* Jan Hofmeyr admitted that 'strong pressure' had been brought to bear upon him personally to engage in the counter demonstrations, though he considered them so 'spontaneous and general' as to render his own participation 'superfluous'; others it seems were not so sure.⁶⁶ Rhodes's political ally, James Sivewright, informed an audience at Worcester, in the Western Cape, that the emissaries recently despatched from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State to 'propagate Republicanism' and 'instil poison into the minds of the Cape Boers in order to prevent their being loyal subjects of the Queen', would not be tolerated.⁶⁷

The Commonly held assumption that the Jameson Raid itself was responsible for turning Cape Afrikaners against Rhodes may be too simplistic; it may be more accurate to conclude with Tamarkin that the receptions proved more decisive than the Raid itself in unifying Afrikaner sentiment against Rhodes. There is evidence to suggest that the counter demonstrations were highly influential in galvanising

⁶⁴ *Central News* telegram of 14 January 1897, *Standard*, 15 January 1897, p5; also *Daily News*, 16 January 1897, p.3.

⁶⁵ *Daily Mail*, 13 January 1897, p.5.

⁶⁶ *Standard*, 20 January 1897, p.7.

⁶⁷ *Daily Mail*: 21 January 1897, p.5.

a sense of racial solidarity among the Afrikaner population and that such a protest far from being spontaneous was, to a significant degree, provoked.

In the twelve months between the Raid and the inquiry there can be little doubt that Rhodes's reputation had recovered sufficiently in public estimations to once again represent a source of anxiety to his adversaries, and a source of optimism to his acolytes in Parliament and the press. As the old year gave way to the new his supporters reflected with satisfaction upon a year in which Rhodes had participated in daring military actions, peace-making indabas, and triumphant receptions which - despite the belated protests - appeared to demonstrate his continued capacity for uniting the Cape colonists under the British flag. Maguire, writing in the *Fortnightly Review*, insisted that having not merely recovered from the Jameson Raid, Rhodes had in fact risen to a 'higher position' than he had occupied before his fall:

In simple truth this *annus mirabilis*, while it began by showing us Mr Rhodes in the depths of dejection and adversity, ends by proving him to all that have eyes to see, to be a greater man and a better man than any but a few persistent hero-worshippers had supposed...plain Cecil Rhodes, the humane and heroic pacificator of Rhodesia, stripped of all his official titles, will return to England a more commanding personality, one that better deserves the admiration and confidence of his countrymen, than the successful Premier who ruled over South Africa from Cape Town this time last year.⁶⁸

W.T. Stead agreed, arguing that Rhodes's conduct in the face of trial and adversity had garnered him fresh admirers in both Britain and South Africa:

When Mr Rhodes returns, as he is expected to do next month, in order to give evidence before the Select Committee, he will come as the representative of all British South Africa, which, having seen him under fire and in adversity is more

⁶⁸ *Fortnightly Review*, January 1897, pp.33-46 (p.45).

enthusiastically devoted to him to-day than it was in the zenith of his prosperity.⁶⁹

Between the extremes of hagiography and denigration there was perhaps a majority of his fellow countrymen who were prepared to bide their time and await the judgement of the London inquiry. The same majority appeared sympathetic to Rhodes, even if that sympathy was more for his policies than the methods he employed; even those who broadly shared his ambitions were divided as to whether Rhodes was a help or a hindrance to the attainment of the ends they had in view. This cautiously sympathetic view was exemplified by the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

Mr Rhodes has come out of the Matabele-cum-Mashona mess very brilliantly, and we need not wonder that British South Africa appreciates his performances. But the history of the world did not begin with that five o'clock tea-party in the Matoppos, it is well to remember. There was another little gathering in a neighbouring country just twelve months ago, which we are going to learn all about before we are much older.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Review of Reviews*, December 1896, pp.500-501.

⁷⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 December 1896, p.2.

Chapter 7

'Hurrah for Rhodes'

To the considerable relief of his critics and those mindful of the nation's reputation, Rhodes's arrival in Britain in January 1897 occasioned no popular demonstration. The inclement weather and the secrecy surrounding Rhodes's travel arrangements ensured that there would be no repeat of the scenes that had so divided opinion in South Africa. Any lingering fears were allayed when shortly after his arrival Rhodes announced that he would accept no public engagements during his stay in Britain, but confine himself to giving evidence before the Special Commission.¹

Despite the absence of a popular demonstration, British opinion remained broadly supportive of Rhodes. For evidence of this one need not look to the imperialist press alone; as the *Liberal Speaker* explained:

...there are very few persons in England who suspect his motives or doubt his patriotism. Neither Mr Stead nor Mr Labouchere represents the real feeling of the British people with regard to the "South African Napoleon". Most persons judge him kindly, acknowledge the greatness of his past services to the Empire, and only differ from him inasmuch as they think that his terrible mistakes prove him to be not quite so clever a person as he imagines himself to be.²

The journal admitted that it was the recollection of Rhodes's unparalleled contribution to the Empire, which had rendered the British people 'so reluctant to condemn him, and so anxious to build for him a bridge by means of which he [might] extricate himself from...the "ghastly mess" of twelve months ago'.³ This essentially benevolent view of Rhodes was equally apparent to observers from further afield. The German newspaper, *Vossische Zeitung*, argued that had it not been for the continuing sympathy of the British people,

¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1897, p.6.

² *Speaker*, 2 January 1897, pp.9-12.

³ *Ibid.*

the Colonial Secretary 'would not have dared to take Mr Cecil Rhodes under his protection...'⁴

Much had been made of compelling Rhodes to 'face the music', both in regard to the Company's controversial administration of Rhodesia, and his own role in the Jameson Raid. Now that the moment had finally arrived, there were many who questioned the wisdom of reinstating the inquiry. The Cape Colony's own investigation into the Raid, in spite of demonstrating Rhodes's complicity, had already attributed responsibility to Jameson. The concurrence of the London Committee would only succeed in proving that which had previously been established, and would only serve to complicate matters if it differed.

The second aspect of the inquiry, namely the proposed investigation into the administration of the Chartered Company, was criticised for the want of a viable alternative to Company rule. The overriding concern in each case was that the inquiry would only succeed in resurrecting ancient grievances, allied to the fact that a non-judicial inquiry of the kind proposed would never succeed in satisfying the various parties concerned, and would likely provoke more questions than answers. The *Daily Mail* captured the prevailing mood of uncertainty:

Mr Rhodes is in England to face the music, but what has become of the music...In plain words, Mr Rhodes is ready for the committee, but the committee is not ready for him. Moreover, there are voices, more numerous and louder every day, which assert that there is no necessity for the committee ever to be ready at all...Shall we put him through the committee, or shall we send him back to Africa to do his proper work?⁵

This interpretation found favour with a number of Parliamentarians, most notably the Unionist MP James M. Maclean. At the eleventh hour Maclean attempted to head off the inquiry by

⁴ Views of the *Vossische Zeitung*, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 5 February 1897, p.5.

⁵ *Daily Mail*, 23 January 1897, p.4.

moving an amendment at the end of January 1897 to the effect that peace had been re-established in the Chartered Company's territory, that all those implicated in the Raid had received their punishment, and that, 'in the interests of all South Africa', it would be 'inexpedient' to re-appoint the Select Committee of 1896.

Maclean claimed public support for his amendment, and insisted that if the Government would only release its supporters in the House from the fetters of 'Party fidelity and discipline', they, too, would call for the Inquiry to be folded up. Maclean argued that it was the Radical members of the House and their representatives in the press who were curiously supporting a reluctant Imperial Government on the reinstatement of the Inquiry.

Maclean's remarks elicited cries of 'Hear, hear' from the Conservative benches, as did his reminder that in spite of the Government's conciliatory attitude towards the Transvaal, the latter had obstinately refused to address the grievances of the Uitlanders. The British people, Maclean declared, felt they had 'sat long enough in sack cloth and ashes lamenting their sins and praising the magnanimity of President Kruger'.⁶ His views were subsequently echoed in the British press, notably by Edward Dicey who, in a piece for the *Quarterly Review*, explained that since the Raid Jameson and his officers had been found guilty in a British court and duly punished, Rhodes had resigned his official positions, and yet the condition of the Uitlander's remained materially unaltered:

With the trial, conviction, and punishment of Dr Jameson and his officers, the common opinion of his countrymen was that we had done our duty, and that the Government of Pretoria had now, in their turn, to do what was right and fair.⁷

Central to the argument of those opposing the reinstatement of the committee was Rhodes's alleged necessity to the maintenance of British South Africa. Maclean had warned:

⁶ HC Deb 28 January 1897, Vol. 45 cc762-78.

⁷ *Quarterly Review*, July 1897, pp.241-267 (pp.247-248).

This House dare not lay its little finger on Mr Rhodes. If it were to do anything of the kind it would set the whole of South Africa in a blaze...South Africa must be maintained for the British Empire by the good will and public opinion of the settlers out there...⁸

The danger of unwarranted interference in the colonial sphere was a warning repeatedly sounded in the final decade of the nineteenth century. It reflected the wider debate concerning the future of the Empire, and the continuing feud between the proponents of Crown rule and colonial rule respectively. The *Daily Mail* highlighted the significance of this distinction in regard to the inquiry when it took issue with the oft-made comparison between the trial of Warren Hastings in the eighteenth century, and the virtual trial of Rhodes at the end of the nineteenth. The former had been the Governor of a British possession 'pure and simple', while the latter was the ex-Premier of a self-governing colony. Under the headline, 'An Evil Precedent', the *Mail* questioned Britain's right to interfere in what was essentially a question for South Africans and the adverse effect this was liable to have on colonial loyalty:

Mr Rhodes...is enthusiastically supported – rightly or wrongly, it makes no difference for the present purpose – by the great mass of British colonists in South Africa, and by a great part of the Dutch...We wonder how many members of the committee have considered how much the loyalty of South Africa is worth keeping alive, and how much they are doing to kill it.⁹

This insistence upon Rhodes's indispensability to the imperial cause did not meet with universal acceptance, nor was this criticism limited to the Radical press. Those who opposed the notion cited Rhodes's divisive reputation as being more likely to undermine the British presence in South African than to strengthen it. Leopold Maxse assured the readers of the *National Review* that 'Mr Maclean's empty threats may be confidently disregarded', before

⁸ HC Deb 28 January 1897, Vol. 45 cc762-78.

⁹ *Daily Mail*, 17 February 1897, p.4.

concluding that 'Mr Rhodes's prestige in South Africa is consistently overstated.'¹⁰

Maxse reasoned that the Africans would hardly rebel in the absence of a man who had instituted a system in Rhodesia 'hardly distinguishable from slavery', and who had supported the 'Strop Act' at the Cape. Neither the colonists of Natal, the Orange Free State, nor the Transvaal could be said to regard Rhodes as their leader. This left the whites of Rhodesia and the Cape Colony; the colonists of the former were small in number and independent minded, while those of the latter were dominated two-to-one by Dutch Afrikaners - the same faction Rhodes had succeeded in marginalising through his involvement in the Jameson Raid. Maxse suggested that even the loyalties of the British colonists themselves were divided, though he admitted the majority would likely side with Rhodes.¹¹

The *Daily Chronicle* went further still, not only had Rhodes rendered himself the confirmed enemy of two of the principal racial groups in South Africa, he had failed to prove himself a true friend to his own race. In exacerbating racial tensions, the journal insisted that Rhodes had derailed what might otherwise have been a bloodless revolution in favour of British power in South Africa:

Confederation was coming – he has shattered it. The supremacy of the British race was being strengthened with every steamer-load of navies and miners and adventurers from the old country. Now they stand armed and vigilant against it forces that would have remained quiescent under the new order, and were destined ultimately to yield to it...¹²

Despite vocal opposition to the contrary, there was cross-party support for the reinstatement of the committee. Both front benches had shown themselves to be in accord. Chamberlain had argued that the re-appointment of the committee was a matter of national honour; it would remove any lingering doubts as to his own complicity, and in

¹⁰ *National Review*, March 1897, pp.7-29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Daily Chronicle*, 23 January 1897, p.6.

contrast to its predecessor would permit a closer investigation of Uitlander grievances. Harcourt substantively agreed, arguing with Chamberlain that the London inquiry would be broader in scope - notably in its intention to investigate the Chartered Company's administration - and by vindicating the Imperial Government promote a spirit of reconciliation in South Africa.

This cross-party support was reflected in the press, where the reinstatement of the committee was perceived by many to be a necessary evil. The Unionist *Standard* argued that 'it would be infinitely more mischievous to shrink from the elucidation of whatever remains obscure than to revive the passions which were kindled by the partial revelations of last year',¹³ while the Liberal *Speaker* argued that not only would the abandonment of the inquiry be incompatible with the honour and interests of the British Empire, but that the Imperial Government would lose all moral influence in its future dealings with President Kruger.¹⁴ This in spite of the journal's acknowledgement that many in the country simply wished the inquiry would go away.¹⁵

II

The accusation that Rhodes and his supporters were attempting to secure a 'popular verdict' had begun at the Cape and followed Rhodes to Britain. For evidence of intimidation critics pointed not only to the expansive receptions held in his honour, but to Rhodes's provocative speeches, and to the consistent appeals and veiled threats of his supporters in Parliament and the press. In the months preceding the inquiry this included the insinuation that the Raid had been developed under the auspices of the Colonial Office. This

¹³ *Standard*, 30 January 1897, p.6.

¹⁴ *Speaker*, 30 January 1897, pp.114-115.

¹⁵ *Ibid*: 16 January 1897, pp.65-67.

provided Rhodes with the opportunity to shield Chamberlain in exchange for a guarantee that the charter would be preserved.¹⁶

Rhodes's supporters were divided as to the wisdom of this strategy. Stead, for example - who had been apprised of Chamberlain's role by Rhodes's solicitor, Bouchier Hawksley - was convinced that it would be impossible to suppress the evidence touching on a conspiracy and that nothing except 'a full public confession' by Rhodes and Chamberlain could avert disaster.¹⁷ When Stead's attempt to prevent the inquiry broke down, he sought to ensure that blame would be fairly apportioned.¹⁸

To this end Stead wrote the semi-fictional *History of the Mystery*, the story of an imagined Jameson Raid which hinted at Chamberlain's involvement and ended with the success of the raiders. Stead had promised his readers revelations; in the event, pressure from Rhodes resulted in the initial publication being unambiguously censored. Unaware that Stead had published an expurgated version of the *Mystery* in London, his friend and collaborator Edmund Garrett, editor of the *Cape Times*, had published articles in South Africa - later to be republished in Britain - summarising the suppressed sections. These included telegraphic communications which had allegedly passed between the Colonial Office and the Rhodes party, including one in which Chamberlain appeared to be urging the conspirators to expedite the revolution at Johannesburg.¹⁹

Commenting on the effects of Stead's 'mystery mongering', the historian Jeffrey Butler has noted that it was successful in 'titillating public curiosity' to the extent that the inquiry itself would be considered an anti-climax, and in presenting the Committee with the

¹⁶ Flint, p.202; also Marais, J.S., *The Fall of Kruger's Republic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1961, p.111.

¹⁷ Baylen, Joseph. O., 'W.T. Stead's History of the Mystery and the Jameson Raid', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 1, November 1964, pp.104-132 (p.109).

¹⁸ Butler, pp.114-115.

¹⁹ Baylen, 'W.T. Stead's History of the Mystery and the Jameson Raid', pp.104-132(p.127).

difficult task of having to prove the innocence of the Imperial Government.²⁰ It was also apparent that the focus of attention had shifted from Rhodes to Chamberlain, as Garrett explained:

The centre of gravity has changed from Cape Town to London, and it has come to seem, for the moment, as if the man who must stand or fall by the Committee were not Mr Cecil Rhodes any longer, but rather Mr Joseph Chamberlain.²¹

Stead's attempt to shift blame from Rhodes to Chamberlain was only partially successful. The *Speaker's* review of the *Mystery* under the headline 'Stead's Damp Squib', typified the sense of anti-climax. 'It is neither good history nor good journalism', the journal complained. 'The most disappointing part of the book is that there are really no revelations about Mr Chamberlain.'²² The *Spectator* noted that the *Mystery* had been 'based upon a foundation of paradoxes and not of facts'.²³ Even Edmund Garrett – having overreached himself with his *Cape Times* articles – attempted to dampen the rumours by stating in his introduction to *The Story of a South African Crisis* that the apparently implicating telegrams were 'not really compromising enough to "hang a dog"'.²⁴ 'As to the mischievousness of [the *Mystery*]', Garrett concluded, 'there seems to have been an almost universal consensus', adding that 'from every point of view', it had been 'a most mistaken and unfortunate effort'.²⁵

Critics were at a loss to explain what Rhodes's supporters were attempting to gain by propagating rumours of Colonial Office complicity. 'They cannot hope to burke the inquiry', reasoned the *Speaker*, 'on the contrary, they have rendered it imperative that the inquiry into the origin of the Raid should be much more thorough and complete than we should, some months ago, have thought desirable.' As for wishing to implicate Chamberlain, this was

²⁰ Butler, p.115.

²¹ Garrett, Edmund, *The Story of an African Crisis*, Archibald, Constable and Co., London 1897, p.xi.

²² *Speaker*, 12 December 1896, p.630.

²³ *Spectator*, 12 December 1896, pp.848-849.

²⁴ Garrett, p.xxii.

²⁵ *Ibid*: pp.xix-xx.

considered a questionable stratagem. Chamberlain's downfall, the journal explained, would diminish the chances of gaining working terms from Kruger, it would give Germany a power in South Africa which she had not possessed, and would make it essential for Chamberlain's successor to adopt a hostile attitude towards Rhodes.²⁶

Such controversies contributed significantly to the misgivings in Britain as to the efficacy of the forthcoming inquiry. Support for Rhodes and the maintenance of the status quo, resistance to the reinstatement of the committee in certain influential quarters, allied with rumours of Colonial Office complicity, combined to recalibrate national expectations. There were fears that the forces which had militated against the inquiry would also render it abortive. The *Speaker* prophetically warned that 'An abortive inquiry would, if possible, be worse than no inquiry at all.'²⁷

It was widely assumed that the second part of the inquiry - pertaining to the Company's administration of Rhodesia - would prove to be the most valuable. Few commentators expected to learn substantially more about the Raid itself, and fewer still believed that Rhodes's position would be materially altered; as the *Observer* explained:

In our judgement his political position will not be touched. As the tribunal before which he is to appear contains bitter enemies and warm partisans, neither his condemnation nor his acquittal by the Committee will carry with it serious consequences. The Committee has no pretensions to being a judicial body.²⁸

The recovery of Rhodes's reputation in the twelve months since the Raid was perhaps not enough to guarantee absolution from the committee, however, there was the acknowledgement that his past services would weigh heavily in his favour, and that his perceived

²⁶ *Speaker*, 12 December 1896, p.630.

²⁷ *Ibid*: 30 January 1897, pp.114-115.

²⁸ *Observer*, 31 January 1897, p.4.

value to the Empire would have a significant bearing on proceedings. The American President, Grover Cleveland, had recently declared that 'The United States would pay £30,000,000 cash down for such a man as Mr Rhodes.'²⁹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that a majority of his countrymen should assume that Rhodes would be better employed in consolidating Britain's hold over South Africa than, in the *Observer's* words, 'eating his heart out as a first class misdemeanant'.³⁰

Moreover, there were early indications that a policy of national solidarity would find favour with the majority, and that imperial interests would take precedence over those of faction. Having likened Rhodes to the Marquis Dupleix,³¹ the *Observer* concluded:

By all means let the full truth about the Chartered Company come to light, but Englishmen should not forget that as the Empire was only won by standing shoulder to shoulder, it is likely to be imperilled by any exhibition of uncalled-for antagonism between the Imperial Government and the one colonial statesman who has done more than any living man to revive the Imperial idea.³²

III

The historian Jeffrey Butler has noted that the existing historiography concerning both the Raid and the subsequent inquiry has been based upon private papers and confidential documents, a perspective not afforded to the Victorians themselves. What was lacking, Butler argued, was a consideration of these events from the perspective of contemporary public sources, and it was with this objective in mind that the present section was composed.³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Joseph Francois Dupleix (1697-1763), Governor General of the French East India Company (1742-1754), whose sudden and controversial recall to Paris in 1754 had precipitated the decline of French influence in India.

³² *Observer*, 31 January 1897, p.4.

³³ Butler, p.267.

On 29 January 1897 it was announced that the fifteen-man South Africa Committee was to be reconstituted.³⁴ The purpose of the inquiry was firstly to investigate the circumstances of Jameson's incursion into the Transvaal in December 1895, secondly, to investigate the past and present administration of the Chartered Company in the territories under its jurisdiction, and finally, to offer recommendations as to future policy.

The inaugural sitting of the South Africa Committee took place on 16 February 1897 in the grand committee room at the Palace of Westminster. Rhodes was first to take the witness chair. In his opening statement he explained that his own financial interests in the Transvaal allied to his conviction that the Kruger regime was an impediment to the progress and unification of the South African States had persuaded him to support the Uitlanders in their pursuit of constitutional reform. To this end he admitted having lent his 'purse and influence'.

Rhodes further admitted to having placed a body of troops under Dr Jameson on the Transvaal border, prepared to take action in the Transvaal under certain eventualities. Rhodes declared that he had not communicated his intentions to the Board of the Chartered Company and that in the event Dr Jameson had entered the Transvaal without his authority. In conclusion he asserted that his decision to intervene had been 'greatly influenced' by his belief that the Government of the South African Republic intended to introduce the influence of a foreign power into Britain's sphere of influence,

³⁴ Notable members representing the Government included the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Michael Hicks Beach, the Rhodes loyalist George Wyndham, and the chairman of the Committee William Jackson. Prominent among the Opposition members was the Liberal leader in the House of Commons Sir William Harcourt, the former Under Secretary of State for the Colonies Sydney Buxton, Rhodes's nemesis Henry Labouchere, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and the Irish Nationalist Edward Blake.

with the attendant consequences to both British interests and the cause of South African federation.³⁵

Rhodes's willingness to assume personal responsibility for the Raid while steadfastly refusing to implicate either the board of the Chartered Company or Imperial officials would become a feature of his testimony. As the first member of the Committee to take Rhodes in hand, Sir William Harcourt began by probing the nature of these connections. In seeking to trace the chain of command Harcourt asked Rhodes whether he ought to have informed High Commissioner Robinson of his intentions. Robinson's statement, which Harcourt had read aloud, stated that to his knowledge Jameson's troops had assembled to guard the railway. Rhodes was far from convincing in affirming the accuracy of Robinson's statement, replying somewhat cryptically: 'I do not like to say anything unfair to the High Commissioner...he sent that statement there and I accept it.' He was even less convincing when Harcourt drew his attention to a telegram Rhodes had received from his brother Frank on 21 December 1895. The coded telegram alluded to the conspirators' intention of having Rhodes accompany the High Commissioner (the 'Chairman') to the Transvaal in the event of a revolution to broker peace between the opposing factions. When Harcourt inquired as to whom the code word 'Chairman' referred, Rhodes failed to respond and begged time to consider his answer.³⁶

In failing to insist upon an answer, and in permitting the matter to be held over to the following session, Harcourt committed a 'major tactical error'.³⁷ By the second sitting Rhodes had recovered his composure, and perhaps sensing the Committee's weakness, grew substantially in confidence as the hearings progressed.

The judgement of contemporaries, and the consensus of modern historians, is that Rhodes's first day in the witness chair was his most

³⁵ *The Times*, 17 February 1897, pp.13-14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Pakenham, p.269.

exacting. He had appeared nervous and evasive, frequently giving monosyllabic answers to the questions asked of him. The *Morning Post* described Rhodes as a 'curiously irregular witness – now cautious, vigilant, and subtle: at others frank, almost to the point of effusive confidence; and occasionally nervous and hesitating'.³⁸ 'He evades giving straight answers', complained the *Speaker*, '[and] he resorts too frequently to the expedient of forgetting awkward facts when he is cross-examined about them.'³⁹ There was also a sense of disappointment that the much vaunted 'Colossus' had been 'outclassed' by his metropolitan counterparts. 'Fine qualities he has doubtless', the *Daily Chronicle* concluded, 'but they are not of the great order of British statesmanship.'⁴⁰

Beyond Rhodes's nervousness and stuttering start, contemporaries detected Harcourt's reluctance to ask the most pertinent questions, or press home his advantage when occasion allowed. As the *Standard* observed:

Whenever Mr Rhodes betrayed signs of restiveness under pressure, the right hon. gentleman abandoned one point for another...Sir William never persisted, except when he considered the inquiry of supreme importance. Nor did he interrupt the reflections and little speeches on the Divine right of the people to rebel in which the Witness indulged.⁴¹

On the second day the balance of power shifted. Rhodes's anxiety dissipated as it became increasingly clear that the committee was not going to press him to reveal more than he was willing to divulge, and, perhaps most significantly, that it would not compel him to incriminate third parties. Harcourt, in contrast, having apparently expended his entire armoury, had failed to extract any material admission.

If Harcourt's 'probe' had failed, as the *Daily Chronicle* phrased it, to reach 'all the tender spots at which it [was] aimed', it soon became

³⁸ *Morning Post*, 17 February 1897, p.7.

³⁹ *Speaker*, 20 February 1897, pp.206-207.

⁴⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, 17 February 1897, p.7.

⁴¹ *Standard*, 17 February 1897, p.4.

clear that other members of the Committee would fair little better.⁴² Of the inquisitors that followed Harcourt the *Morning Post* would later remark:

It cannot be said that there was anything in the examination – or, presumptively, cross-examination – of Mr Rhodes by Mr John Ellis, Mr Sydney Buxton, or Mr Blake...that unduly tried the equanimity or the resources of the witness. Judging by bare results he outweighed them all, one after another, in succession...⁴³

Harcourt's examination of Rhodes during the first sitting was as close as the committee would come to eliciting any significant information from the 'South African Colossus'. The *Daily Mail* credited Rhodes's initial statement before the Committee, in which he had assumed personal responsibility for the Raid, with having disarmed the Opposition. The myriad of ingenious ruses employed by the committee to assign guilt to Rhodes subsequently fell flat.⁴⁴

Emboldened Rhodes proceeded to hold court; seemingly assured of a sympathetic hearing, he indulged in speeches, and on occasion challenged the Committee itself. 'His confidence', the *Manchester Guardian* reported, 'was almost amusing, developing as it did, under the encouragement of Mr Chamberlain and Sir Michael Hicks Beach, into unabashed egotism.'⁴⁵ Far from being the 'outclassed' colonial politician, it was Rhodes who increasingly had the better of his Westminster counterparts. In the eyes of one German newspaper - the sentiments of which were re-published in the British press - Rhodes's conduct soon bordered on the impudent. The *Norddeutsch* noted that Rhodes had 'appeared before the committee with the indifferent nonchalance of a man who is asking himself what on earth induces the dwarfs to summon the giant before them'.⁴⁶

⁴² *Daily Chronicle*, 20 February 1897, p.7.

⁴³ *Morning Post*, 24 February 1897, pp.7-8.

⁴⁴ *Daily Mail*, 27 February 1897, p.3.

⁴⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1897, p.9.

⁴⁶ Views of the *Norddeutsch*, quoted in the *Standard*, 20 February 1897, p.5.

By the third sitting Rhodes appeared 'more Napoleonic than ever'. The *Manchester Guardian* attributed this in part to the cordial handshake he had received from the Prince of Wales prior to the commencement. This gesture of royal approval was reported throughout the British press, and demonstrated just how far Rhodes was from being a discredited figure.⁴⁷

A distinguishing characteristic of the inquiry was its informality, a feature which quickly garnered the disapproval of the British press. The consumption of food and beverages by witnesses and committee members alike became a metaphor for the amateurish conduct of the proceedings. On the third day of the inquiry it appeared to the *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent that William Jackson, rather than chairing a 'State inquiry of the first importance', was instead to be found 'presiding over a picnic'.⁴⁸ Rhodes proved particularly adept at employing sandwiches and bottles of stout in his defence, using them to demonstrate his 'ostentatious indifference to parts of the investigation'.⁴⁹

IV

If British Radicals expected Henry Labouchere's famed candour to cut through the fog of conspiracy they were to be disappointed. The most remarkable aspect of the exchanges was the studious courtesy with which they were conducted. Labouchere would later admit to having been moderately impressed by Rhodes, crediting him with a 'certain charisma, independence of spirit, and a keen sense of purpose'.⁵⁰ The *Daily News* stated that Rhodes, for his part, appeared to regard the editor of *Truth* 'as a clever man who had gone astray, and with whom, therefore, it was particularly well

⁴⁷ Butler, p.150; also *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1897, p.4.

⁴⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1897, p.4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Truth*, 18 March 1897, pp.630-631.

worthwhile to take some troubling, in teaching the “real hang of the thing”.⁵¹

Labouchere was defeated as much by his own obsession with stock-jobbing as he was by the spoiling tactics of his colleagues on the Committee. In the attempt to demonstrate the validity of his own pet theories concerning the economic motivations for the Raid, Labouchere lost focus, and in so doing failed to pursue lines of questioning which may have proven more beneficial. Instead he wasted valuable time asking Rhodes how it was that the Transvaal mining companies could complain of being over taxed when they could afford to pay large dividends to shareholders; or whether the Transvaal would have fallen under the auspices of the Chartered Company had the revolution proven successful. Rhodes batted away such questions with ease. When Labouchere asked whether the value of Chartered Company shares would have increased had the Raid proven successful, Rhodes – according to the *Daily News* – ‘seemed amused at the idea that so foolish a question could enter anybody’s head, and replied pityingly “Certainly not”’.⁵²

The editor of *Truth* proved no more adept at compelling Rhodes to implicate Government officials than his Liberal counterparts. When quizzed by Labouchere as to whether Rhodes’s agent in London, Dr Rutherford Harris, had conveyed Chamberlain’s approval of the pre-laid plans for the Raid, Rhodes once again pleaded his unwillingness to implicate third parties, and with both the Chairman and the Attorney General periodically arriving to his assistance, Rhodes was able to endure with his confidences intact.

It was during one of their exchanges that the impotence of the Committee would finally be laid bare:

Labouchere: You are not prepared to tell us who, in Africa, knew of your intentions?

⁵¹ *Daily News*, 27 February 1897, p.5.

⁵² *Ibid*: 3 March 1897, p.5.

Rhodes: No, I think it would be unfair.

Labouchere: Do you know that you have undertaken to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth?

Rhodes: What I say depends to a larger extent on the powers of your committee.

As an investigative body the committee would never entirely regain its credibility. Rhodes's six days as a witness had demonstrated that incriminating documents could be suppressed, awkward questions side-stepped, and the truth concealed with impunity. Labouchere's biographer, Hesketh Pearson, would later concede that his subject's examination of Rhodes had been 'quite valueless'.⁵³ Echoing the *Pall Mall Gazette's* cartoon depiction of a giant Cecil Rhodes facing a Lilliputian Labouchere, Pearson noted that the contest between the two men:

...seemed like a duel between David and Goliath. But this Goliath was armed from scalp to toe, partly by his own ease and self-assurance and partly by the sympathy of the committee, and the pellets of this David could not so much as dent his armour.⁵⁴

Unable to substantiate his charges with anything resembling corroborating evidence, Labouchere's wild accusations only served to damage the credibility of the committee still further. From the outset his pet theory that the Raid had been predicated to increase the share prices of the Chartered Company had appeared vague and insubstantial. At length even his fellow committee member George Wyndham frankly admitted that 'it was a mysterious connection' which he himself could not 'quite fathom'.⁵⁵ To those nominally supportive of the Opposition in the British press, the apparent fragility of Labouchere's case was scarcely credible, while its consequences

⁵³ Pearson, Hesketh, *Labby: The Life of Henry Labouchere*, Hamish Hamilton, London 1936, p.278.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*: p.277, also *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 January 1897, p.2.

⁵⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1897, p.9.

were expected to redound to the advantage of the witness. As the *Daily News* explained:

Mr Labouchere's failure to cross-examine or allege any facts in support of the suggestions which he has so persistently made against Mr Rhodes was rather startling...Mr Rhodes has every reason to be grateful to Mr Labouchere for the opportunity of meeting him in the open, and denying the most serious of all the accusations against him.⁵⁶

W.T. Stead agreed, insisting that Rhodes had 'turned the tables' on his arch-enemy, and exposed his charges as malicious slanders. Stead suggested that in future Labouchere would be well advised to confine his attacks to the columns of *Truth*, where his intended victims would not have recourse to a reply.⁵⁷

V

The Conservative and Unionist members appeared content to talk Rhodes through the particulars of the case, presented in such a manner as to reflect favourably upon the Government, and invariably upon Rhodes himself. This approach was typified by the Colonial Secretary himself who, in his adopted role as counsel for the defence, appeared more concerned with placing on record his own version of events than in examining the witness.⁵⁸ As the correspondent for the *Morning Post* recalled:

The questions were couched in clear and simple terms, and were so framed that the witness was able to answer most of them with a simple Yes or No. Indeed, the impression left on the hearers was rather that Mr Chamberlain himself was giving the evidence, and that Mr Rhodes was corroborating, from his own memory, the various transactions in which the Colonial Office had played a part.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *Daily News*, 3 March 1897, p.5.

⁵⁷ *Review of Reviews*, March 1897, p.205.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 6 March 1897, pp.15-16.

⁵⁹ *Morning Post*, 6 March 1897, pp.7-8.

It was increasingly apparent that the committee was heavily divided along political lines. Government members frequently betrayed their impatience with the examinations indulged in by their Opposition counterparts. They would interrupt promising lines of questioning, narrow the scope of the inquiry at crucial moments, and took visible delight in 'Mr Rhodes's flippancies'.⁶⁰

In spite of these obstacles the barbs of the Opposition did occasionally find their mark. Rhodes's integrity was questioned when he struggled to corroborate his own accusations of German interference in the Imperial sphere; when he failed to satisfactorily explain why Jameson had been left to carry the burden of the Raid for so long; why he had not acted more decisively to recall the raiders, and how he had managed to coordinate a rebellion with men and materiel from the Chartered Company without informing the Board. When pressed to defend the latter incongruity Rhodes was forced to conclude: 'The best answer I can give you is that I cannot defend it at all.'⁶¹

While such exchanges were damaging to Rhodes, they were considerably more damaging to the credibility of the inquiry. Rhodes was clearly concealing information, yet it was the failure of the Committee to hold Rhodes accountable that would live longest in the memory.

VI

It was ironic that the steamer which had conveyed Rhodes to London in his bid to preserve the Chartered Company should also have counted among its passengers another famous South African determined to destroy it. The second passenger was the South African novelist Olive Schreiner, celebrated author of *The Story of an*

⁶⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1897, p.4.

⁶¹ *The Times*, 20 February 1897, pp.4-5.

African Farm and a woman who was at that moment - at least in the opinion of W.T. Stead - 'the most famous of all Colonial writers'.⁶²

In the early 1890s Schreiner had counted herself among Rhodes's most fervent admirers, however, in common with many former friends she had grown to detest his methods. The wars against the Ndebele, the Jameson Raid, his attitude to the so-called 'Native Question', and allegations of political corruption, had all conspired to convert Schreiner from an ardent admirer into a tenacious foe.⁶³

Schreiner's latest novel, *Trooper Peter Halket*, told the story of a trooper serving with the Chartered Company in Rhodesia. Schreiner describes Halket as the archetypal coloniser, with all the material aspirations and prejudices she considered the hallmarks of that class. For his part, Halket believes he is engaged in the important work of reclaiming Africa from barbarism, and evidently seeks to marry this to his own personal ambitions. Halket is reformed, however, by a mysterious stranger he encounters one night while lost on the veldt. The stranger he encounters is Christ who, in the course of a long conversation which makes up most of the novel, reveals to Halket the errors of his ways. A reformed man, he re-joins his troop the next morning determined to live a better life. The book concludes with Halket intervening on behalf of a Shona prisoner captured during the rebellion in Rhodesia who is being mistreated by his captives. When Halket attempts to free the prisoner he is himself shot. Rhodes does not feature as a character in the novel, however, his name and that of his Company are frequently invoked when Halket describes the brutality and immorality attendant upon the colonisation of Rhodesia.

⁶² *Review of Reviews*, February 1897, p.106.

⁶³ In a letter to her mother Olive Schreiner intimated that her political break with Rhodes came as a result of the Logan-Sivewright corruption scandal, 1892-93. See Olive Schreiner to Rebecca Schreiner nee Lyndall, May 1896, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription.

Trooper Peter was a thinly-veiled political tract in the guise of an allegorical novel. It was rushed into print on 17 February 1897 with a first issue of 20,000 copies – a large edition for a six shilling book.⁶⁴ The novel's publication was timed to coincide with Rhodes's appearance before the inquiry, and was calculated to inflict maximum damage upon Rhodes's reputation and that of the Chartered Company.

The reason why this novel - more famous in historical circles for its connections to British Imperialism, than among literary scholars for its artistic merits - failed to damage Rhodes's reputation at this vital juncture, is worthy of consideration.

In the first instance there were objections to the choices Schreiner herself had made concerning both the composition and timing of the novel. The decision of Schreiner and her publisher to issue the novel in coincidence with Rhodes's appearance before the London inquiry united critics from across the political spectrum in the opinion that this action had been both vindictive and unjust. This objection was raised by such journals as the *Speaker*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*; however, it was the *Standard* which succeeded in most accurately conveying the sense of indignation:

To bring charges against public men, especially while the chief among them is virtually on his trial in England, and to bring them in a manner that would make any reply on their part not only undignified but ridiculous, and to send out the attack on these men broadcast in the shape of a story-book, among people who understand little of actual facts and politics, is not fair fighting.⁶⁵

Perhaps unsurprisingly for such an overtly political piece, the critics divided sharply along ideological lines. If a consensus existed it was in the acknowledgement that Schreiner's decision to place her opinions into the mouth of Christ was at best ill-advised, and at worst

⁶⁴ Olive Schreiner to T. Fisher Unwin, 30 January 1897, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription; also *Daily News*, 10 February 1897, p.6.

⁶⁵ *Standard*, 20 February 1897, p.8.

blasphemous. If the imperialist press discerned no redeeming feature in this exercise, the Radical press was willing to acknowledge its effectiveness if not its good taste. The objections of the *Daily Chronicle* in this regard may be considered typical:

We may say at once that its formula is one for which we have no great liking...to make the Divine Figure act as the mouthpiece for your own opinions, as the puppet of which you hold the strings, argues, to our mind, a self-confidence which is somewhat excessive...it is a step which most people would hesitate – and, we think, rightly hesitate – to take.⁶⁶

The authoress Margaret Oliphant concurred. Reviewing *Trooper Peter* in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Oliphant criticised the interposition of God in the story as 'little less than blasphemy', adding:

Great authority would we all get, no doubt, for our own sentiments, could we convince even all the noble army of fools that we had the sanction of the Saviour of mankind.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, there was a consensus in the Radical press that Schreiner's 'audacity' had ultimately succeeded in achieving her desired ends; as the *Speaker* admitted:

We confess that this feature of the story at the first glance seemed to be absolutely revolting; but we must add that with such wonderful skill and delicacy does Olive Schreiner perform her task, that before it is finished she reconciles her readers to her audacity, and leaves them completely under the spell of her enchantment.⁶⁸

Similarly, Leopold Maxse argued that while the novel's 'preaching' tone might be resented, 'its daring [would] be forgiven for its doctrine'.⁶⁹ It was with similar justification that the *Manchester Guardian* conceded the aptness of the novel's frontispiece, a gruesome photograph depicting Rhodesian rebels hanging from a tree in the presence of their white captors. It 'is very horrible', the *Guardian* admitted, 'but we cannot blame the author or publisher for giving it here. It is only through such shocks that English people can

⁶⁶ *Daily Chronicle*, 20 February 1897, p.6.

⁶⁷ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1897, pp.455-484 (pp.478-479).

⁶⁸ *Speaker*, 27 February 1897, pp.253-254.

⁶⁹ *National Review*, March 1897, pp.7-29.

be roused to a sense of the degradation which England is suffering in South Africa'.⁷⁰

In the final analysis, the *Standard* was probably correct in the assertion that, however cleverly done, the manipulation of Christ in this manner was in all likelihood 'too daring an achievement to please the majority'.⁷¹ As for Schreiner's 'preaching' tone, imperialistic critics were not alone in their disparagement. George Schreiner (no relation), a reader for the publishing House Fisher Unwin, in his (apparently) private report on *Trooper Peter*, stated that he too regarded aspects of the writing as 'ludicrously weak, goody goody and obviously the result of pumped-up feeling, and of an inspiration that won't work'.⁷²

The second factor to limit the novel's effectiveness was Schreiner's inability to leaven her political invective against Rhodes with a little moderation and restraint. In *Trooper Peter* she overstated her case; the criticism was so severe, and so general, as to elicit the effects of cognitive dissonance in her intended readership. This was particularly notable in Oliphant's instinctive rejection of Schreiner's portrayal of British manhood in Rhodesia:

Is this the kind of thing which the troopers in South Africa do? Do they torture wounded and helpless prisoners...Is their whole aim and object nothing but murder and robbery...What has Mrs Schreiner to produce in support of her horrible assertion? Without evidence we refuse to believe.⁷³

Schreiner's attacks, Oliphant concluded, were 'so violent and unmeasured as to defeat any possible object she could have had in uttering them'. This in-turn, Oliphant insisted, provided grounds to hope 'that the rest, too, [was] but venomous spume and foam'.⁷⁴ In

⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 23 February 1897, p.12.

⁷¹ *Standard*, 20 February 1897, p8.

⁷² Olive Schreiner to T. Fisher Unwin, 14 Dec. 1896, Harry Ransom Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription. (Two reports are appended as a notation to the above letter – one by George Schreiner, and the other by fellow Fisher Unwin reader W.H. Chesson).

⁷³ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1897, pp.455-484 (p.480).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

his report for Fisher Unwin George Schreiner noted that if only the author had controlled her invective and adopted a more subtle approach - by portraying, for example, the 'worst features of the average man in a rush for gold' - she might have succeeded in producing an effective piece of propaganda; 'but as it is', Schreiner concluded, 'she gives herself away to all but the Religious public'.⁷⁵

No less deleterious to *Trooper Peter's* failure to damage Rhodes's reputation was its artistic deficiencies. Not only was the employment of Christ as an advocate of Schreiner's political views considered to be in poor taste, it was also a worn out literary device. W.T. Stead reviewed the novel under the heading 'If Christ came to Matabeleland', a parody of his own work, 'If Christ came to Chicago'.⁷⁶ The *Daily Chronicle* described the book as one of the 'When Christ came to...variety', and in her review for *Blackwood's*, Margaret Oliphant listed numerous nineteenth century authoresses who had invoked the figure of God or Christ in their work.

The charges levelled against Rhodes had been digested many times before; there was nothing revelatory in Schreiner's novel that was likely to inspire a great popular revolt against the Chartered Company. Furthermore, the political invective dominated all considerations of theme, character, and plot, to such an extent that many critics considered the novel to be of little artistic value; as the *Morning Post* explained:

Had the book been only a little above the average as a novel its violent denunciations of the Company might have been forgiven as an error in art. But it is, in fact, a sermon, in which the stock arguments of those who desire to see the extinction of Mr Rhodes as a political force are repeated with wearisome reiteration...There is not an accusation in the entire volume that has not been heard again and again.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Report by George Schreiner, appended to Olive Schreiner to T. Fisher Unwin, 14 Dec. 1896.

⁷⁶ *Review of Reviews*, March 1897, p.286.

⁷⁷ *Morning Post*, 18 February 1897, p.2.

W.H. Chesson, a reader for Fisher Unwin, complained that 'gradually, the tract-element ha[d] been displacing the imaginative in [Schreiner's] work', a fact he considered 'grievously apparent in "Trooper Peter Halket"'.⁷⁸ Margaret Oliphant described the novel as 'a political pamphlet of great bitterness, linked on to the very smallest thread of story that ever carried red-hot opinions and personal abuse of the fiercest kind into the world'. Schreiner's characters, Oliphant complained, were anachronistic stereotypes, or were otherwise hopelessly implausible. The first incarnation of Peter Halket was considered a case in point. Did it not stretch the bounds of credulity, Oliphant asked rhetorically, that such a primitive specimen of man could at the same time have grasped the complexities of floating gold mining companies and of making money by stock-jobbing in the manner of Rhodes, Beit, and Barnato.⁷⁹

In fairness to Schreiner, critics were divided as to the literary merits of *Trooper Peter*. At one end of the spectrum the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail* described it respectively as 'a great disappointment',⁸⁰ and as 'little better than a potboiler with a political moral'.⁸¹ In contrast the *Speaker* asserted that 'Not even in "A South African Farm" is the exquisite skill and delicacy of Olive Schreiner's art displayed more conspicuously than in these pages.'⁸² Elsewhere, W.T. Stead acknowledged the 'powerful' conception of the novel, stating that it had evidently been 'worked out' with the same 'strenuous earnestness and passionate conviction' that characterised Olive Schreiner in her most 'exalted moods'.⁸³

For many critics in the Radical press, *Trooper Peter's* failures as a novel were more than compensated by the persuasiveness of the

⁷⁸ Olive Schreiner to T. Fisher Unwin, 14 Dec. 1896 (Two reports are appended as a notation to the aforementioned letter – one by George Schreiner, and the other by fellow Fisher Unwin reader W.H. Chesson).

⁷⁹ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1897, pp.455-484 (p.477).

⁸⁰ *Morning Post*, 18 February 1897, p.2.

⁸¹ *Daily Mail*, 19 February 1897, p.3.

⁸² *Speaker*, 27 February 1897, pp.253-254.

⁸³ *Review of Reviews*, March 1897, p.286.

arguments it advanced. 'Though it may be a defective work of art', the *Daily Chronicle* conceded, 'it is, what the most perfect work of art sometimes, unfortunately, is not, a good action.' The *Chronicle* celebrated the novel's 'moral earnestness', its 'singleness of purpose', and the 'sincerity of its plea for justice and charity to the African native'. The journal concluded: 'It is in these things that the true significance of the book, its "virtue", is to be found.'⁸⁴

To its admirers the novel highlighted the dangers of entrusting a Chartered Company with the administration of vast tracts of Africa. Leopold Maxse expressed the hope that *Trooper Peter* would act as a 'new *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', awakening the British people to the 'impiety' of 'shirking' their responsibilities in the imperial sphere, and the deleterious effects of such negligence on the Africans themselves. 'What independent testimony we can acquire', Maxse argued, 'corroborates Miss Schreiner's view of the manner in which the Chartered Company is "civilising" South Africa.'⁸⁵

Maxse was not alone in questioning the efficacy of Britain's civilising mission as prosecuted by Rhodes and the Chartered Company. The *Speaker*, notwithstanding its criticism of Schreiner's approach, stated that in asserting her charges against Chartered rule, the author had spoken 'little that was not true'. The *Speaker* did not doubt that 'the original owners of the soil suffer[ed] whilst "civilisation" in the shape of the hunters for gold press[ed] forward on their mad quest'. Whether this was intended as a criticism of the Chartered Company specifically, or of Britain's capacity to improve the lot of Africans generally, is not immediately apparent from the *Speaker's* comments. Nevertheless, like Schreiner's novel itself, it demonstrates a concern for Africans at a time when criticism of the Empire, or of Imperial policy, was concerned more with its effect upon the imperialising power than its effect upon indigenous peoples.

⁸⁴ *Daily Chronicle*, 20 February 1897, p.6.

⁸⁵ *National Review*, March 1897, pp.16-17.

The final consideration militating against the success of *Trooper Peter Halket* as a political weapon was that in couching her arguments in the form of a novel, Schreiner found herself addressing the wrong audience. Even those broadly sympathetic to the author's position could not help but conclude that charges as serious as those laid down in *Trooper Peter*, warranted greater explanation than could possibly be afforded in the pages of a novel; as the *Speaker* explained:

...truths of this sort ought to be stated publicly, and ought to be accompanied by chapter and verse, if they are to make their full impression on the public mind. To give them to the world in the guise of a work of fiction, where no definite fact is stated and there is no possibility of proof or disproof of the charges, is fair to nobody.⁸⁶

The journal argued that no 'serious-minded' man was likely to have his view of the world shaped by a six shilling novel. It was postulated that Gladstone 'might have stirred the hearts and imaginations of a greater number of people...' if he had cast his pamphlet about the 'Bulgarian horrors' in the form of a 'romance', and yet it was doubtful, the *Speaker* concluded, 'whether the people thus moved would have been those whom it was most necessary to impress'.⁸⁷

Such failings had been foreseen by the readers at Fisher Unwin. Prior to its publication W.H. Chesson, reflecting upon the merits of *Trooper Peter* in his January report, concluded:

The pity is that, as a tract, the thing is not likely to do a ha'p'orth of good. It is the Statham style that tells best. Mrs Schreiner aims at the heart; Statham aims at the head. And the head is the place to aim at decidedly, if you want to transfer political views.⁸⁸

So it was that *Trooper Peter Halket* ultimately failed to inspire the popular backlash against Rhodes and the Chartered Company that Schreiner had envisaged. In a letter to her brother William Schreiner

⁸⁶ *Speaker*, 27 February 1897, pp.253-254.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Report by W.H. Chesson, appended to Olive Schreiner to T. Fisher Unwin, 14 Dec. 1896.

in 1908, Olive conceded that in a political sense the work had failed to make so much as a dint in Rhodes's reputation, and yet for all its perceived failures as a novel she remained unrepentant:

Peter Halket killed me...It isn't artistic; it failed in doing anything; and yet if I were dead I would like them to write on my grave "She wrote Peter Halket", nothing else. It's funny but when I think of dying the only thing that comforts me is that I wrote that book.⁸⁹

VII

For months press criticism had been ebbing away from Rhodes and the Chartered Company and concentrating instead upon the committee. With the publication of the report and the subsequent debate in the Commons the conversion was complete, with the focus of criticism widening to encompass both political parties of the state.

The failures of the London inquiry into the Jameson Raid were immediately apparent to contemporaries; so much so that by the time the committee's findings were published expectations had substantially diminished. On publication day itself the *Daily Chronicle's* leader article contemptuously proclaimed: 'The mouse is born.'⁹⁰

The committee had been wracked by divisions, both political and personal which had militated against a coherent approach. Parliamentarians lacked both the time and the judicial training to fulfill the role of interrogators. The consensus of the British press was that committee members were both too numerous and too biased. This had inevitably resulted in 'much traversing and re-traversing of familiar ground'.⁹¹ Addressing the issue of bias, the *National Review*

⁸⁹ Olive Schreiner to William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, 10 May 1908, UCT Manuscripts & Archives, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription (lines 30-35).

⁹⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, 14 July 1897, p.6.

⁹¹ *Morning Post*, 6 March 1897, pp.7-8.

concluded that the signatures of Labouchere, Wyndham, and Bigham 'would add no weight to any report'.⁹²

The committee had also committed a number of glaring tactical errors which were immediately perceptible. Prominent among these had been the decision to examine Rhodes first. Months earlier - recognising the difficulties attendant upon this approach - the *Speaker* had warned:

The decision does not seem calculated to enable the full truth to be elicited from this supremely important witness. No doubt subsequent witnesses will make many statements on which it would be desirable to have some explanation from Mr Rhodes, but it will, of course, be impossible to cross-examine him more than once.⁹³

The Committee's subsequent failure to compel Rhodes to produce the telegrams which may have implicated officials of both the Chartered Company and the Colonial Office more than vindicated the concerns of contemporaries. Moreover, Rhodes's testimony established two detrimental precedents to the efficacy of the investigation. Firstly, the committee excused witnesses from answering questions which might tend to incriminate third parties; secondly - and the factor which provoked the greatest censure - it failed to insist upon the production of vital documents pertaining to the conspiracy.

The report of the South Africa Committee was tabled on 13 July 1897. The committee determined that Jameson had crossed the frontier without Rhodes's permission, however, the latter was charged with 'subsidising, organising, and stimulating an armed insurrection against the Government of the South African Republic, and employing the forces and resources of the Chartered Company to support such a revolution'.⁹⁴ The report did not recommend any

⁹² *National Review*, April 1897, pp.278-292 (p.280).

⁹³ *Speaker*, 13 February 1897, pp.184-186 (p.184).

⁹⁴ HC 311, Second Report from the Select Committee on British South Africa, 1897, p.xvi.

specific punishment for Rhodes, and explicitly rejected the charges of stock-jobbing.

The Raid itself was unequivocally condemned, however, only a small number of officials were directly implicated. Subordinates took the fall for Chamberlain in London and for Sir Hercules Robinson at the Cape. Of the Chartered Company's officials only Beit and Maguire were censured. As for the so-called 'missing telegrams', the committee concluded that if they had been likely to exonerate Rhodes and transfer the blame to others, they would have been produced.⁹⁵

Reaction to the report ranged from a philosophical acquiescence that the committee had gone as far as it could, to the palpable indignation of the Radical press. Under the headline 'Ad Nauseum' the *Pall Mall Gazette* captured the mood of the former, concluding that: 'This Committee has got about as far as this Committee ever would get if it sat till a fortnight after Doomsday.'⁹⁶ *The Times* articulated the principal justification for the inquiry's curtailment in arguing that its continuation would sour relations between Britain and the South African States which at that moment showed encouraging signs of recovery:

The general feeling, we are sure, will be one of relief at the termination of an inquiry which can produce no possible advantage if carried further, and which, if protracted indefinitely must delay or defeat that process of reconciliation which we are happily already beginning to witness in South Africa.⁹⁷

For the Liberal and Radical press the decision to abandon the inquiry only served to compound the belief that the hearings had been a fiasco. Specifically there was anger that the second part of the inquiry into the administration of the Chartered Company was to be dropped, and concern that the failure to thoroughly investigate

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.xv.

⁹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 July 1897, p.1.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 14 July 1897, p.9.

Colonial Office complicity would generate conspiracy theories deeply damaging to Britain's reputation abroad. 'If the matter rests there', warned the *Daily Chronicle*, 'let no one hereafter be surprised when foreigners laugh at our professions of national honour and good faith.'⁹⁸ The excuse that the Committee had run out of time convinced no one; as the *Daily News* observed:

For the Committee to say "we could not stop to ascertain the full truth because it was so important for us to be only 12 months late instead of 15", would strike the ordinary man as an insult to his intelligence.⁹⁹

The inquiry had provoked more questions than answers. In a letter to the *Observer* the writer Edward Dicey expressed the bemusement of his countrymen when he admitted: 'We know rather less, if possible, about the subject-matter of the inquiry than we did after the Cape report and the Jameson trial.'¹⁰⁰ The inquiry had also deepened rumours implicating the Imperial Government in a conspiracy to overthrow the Transvaal Government, a development which played directly into Rhodes's hands. As W.T. Stead explained, in seeking to conceal Chamberlain's modest role in the preparation of the Raid, the 'fraudulent make-belief of no inquiry' had succeeded instead in implicating the British political establishment:

The result is that the world at large has come to the conclusion that the skeleton is infinitely worse than it ever was pretended to be, and, what is much worse, that the scandal attaches not merely to the Colonial Office and its Chief, but to all her Majesty's Ministers.¹⁰¹

Allusions to Colonial Office complicity in the Raid had been made throughout the inquiry. Witness statements from members of the Rhodes party, in addition to the telegrams which had been produced, suggested that the conspirators at least affected to believe that they had received the tacit approval of the Imperial authorities. Of particular interest had been the telegrams which had passed

⁹⁸ *Daily Chronicle*, 14 July 1897, p.6.

⁹⁹ *Daily News*, 14 July 1897, p.4.

¹⁰⁰ *Observer*, 6 June 1897, p.4.

¹⁰¹ *Review of Reviews*, July 1897, p.42.

between the conspirators and *The Times* journalist Flora Shaw. The significance of these disclosures had largely been explained away, however, in conjunction with the telegrams Rhodes had elected to withhold, they succeeded in raising the suspicions of contemporaries. With rumours abroad that the Rhodes party was blackmailing the Colonial Office to escape further punishment, and so preserve the charter, it was considered necessary to the satisfaction of national honour that the telegrams be produced.

This view was predictably strongest among the Liberal journals, which demanded to know why, if Chamberlain was innocent, did he not insist upon the production of the telegrams and clear his name; as the *Speaker* observed:

When a man who is being blackmailed not only neglects to vindicate his character and expose the alleged blackmailers, but takes a course which virtually shields them from justice, the world is inclined to place a very black construction upon his conduct.¹⁰²

Ironically, the British press and his Parliamentary colleagues were almost unanimous in publicly professing their belief in Chamberlain's innocence. Concern lay more in the perception of Colonial Office complicity than actual belief in a far-reaching conspiracy. If there was disagreement on the issue, it was among the Liberal journals who postulated that Chamberlain may have suspected Rhodes's intentions or been cognizant of the 'plan'. Only hard-line Radical journals such as *Reynolds's Newspaper* were so brazen as to advocate Chamberlain's involvement in the Raid itself:

It is quite clear that both Mr Chamberlain and Mr Rhodes should be on their trial for having conspired to raid a friendly State. Chamberlain protested his innocence but he took no steps to procure the publication of the evidence which still remains concealed. Therefore the public are fully entitled to consider him as guilty...we say, "To the dock with Chamberlain and Rhodes."¹⁰³

¹⁰² *Speaker*, 5 June 1897, pp.613-615 (p.613).

¹⁰³ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 18 July 1897, p.1.

Publicly the Liberal front bench pronounced Chamberlain's innocence, as for that matter did Henry Labouchere. Confronted with the choice of supporting Rhodes and his conspirators - whom they suspected of blackmail - and supporting the embattled Colonial Secretary, Liberal politicians and their counterparts in the press likely considered the latter to be the lesser of two evils. They were also reluctant to delve too far into the conspiracy for fear of revealing the earlier contingency plans of their own officials.¹⁰⁴

It is likely that patriotic considerations influenced the response of the British press to the issue of Chamberlain's complicity, particularly in light of the criticisms propounded by foreign journals. There was, moreover, a collective reluctance to strike an unpatriotic note during the Jubilee summer of 1897, the theme of which had been imperial unity. All of these considerations redounded to Rhodes's advantage. As dissatisfaction with the political class grew, Rhodes himself slipped further into the shadows.

Criticism of the inquiry was by no means universal. Elements of the Unionist press, in particular, were inclined to praise the committee for its expediency, and considered it prudent to leave recommendations as to punishment and future policy to the Executive. Contemporaries also understood both the evidential limitations of the 'missing telegrams', and were pragmatic in their assessment of Chamberlain's participation.

In Parliament both Liberal and Unionist committee members defended the decision not to insist upon the production of the 'missing telegrams'. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, argued that the withheld documents could be no more incriminating than those which had already passed before the committee. Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman explained that 'They were telegrams from A to B about C.' While admitting he was no lawyer, Campbell-Bannerman stated that he was under the

¹⁰⁴ Flint, p.208.

impression that such evidence was of dubious value.¹⁰⁵ In a widely reported speech the Liberal statesman John Morley explained that ultimately the public would have to decide whether to believe Chamberlain and his 'excellent' Under-Secretary Lord Selborne, or whether to believe 'this gang of plotters...whose whole proceedings from first to last are a tissue of deception and of falsehood'.¹⁰⁶ The *Spectator* typified the nonchalance of much of the Unionist press towards Chamberlain's foreknowledge of the Raid, noting:

Of course he knew it, just as his predecessors before him had known it, and of course he was aware that if certain things happened it might be necessary for the British Government to restore order...But between this knowledge and this watchfulness over British interests and the direct fostering of a revolution in Johannesburg there is a world of difference.¹⁰⁷

The principal debate regarding the inquiry took place in the Commons on 26 July 1897. The Liberal MP Philip Stanhope proposed a motion in two parts; the first regretted the inconclusive nature of the committee's report, particularly its failure to 'recommend specific steps with regard to Mr Rhodes', and to immediately report the failure of Bouchier Hawksley (the latter's solicitor) to produce the 'missing telegrams'.¹⁰⁸ The second proposition stated that Hawksley be compelled to appear at the Bar of the House, and produce copies of the aforementioned telegrams.

Committee members Harcourt and Hicks Beach insisted that members were entitled to disagree with the findings of the report, but could not accurately describe it as inconclusive. As to the failure to recommend a specific punishment for Rhodes, the failure of Opposition members to do likewise largely succeeded in blunting the attack. Labouchere went as far as any in modestly advocating that

¹⁰⁵ HC Deb 26 July 1897, Vol. 51 cc1093-182.

¹⁰⁶ *The Times*, 29 September 1897, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ *Spectator*, 12 December 1896, p.8.

¹⁰⁸ HC Deb 19 July 1897, Vol. 51, cc479-506. Rhodes's solicitor, Bouchier Hawksley, could have been called to explain himself before the House of Commons as to the suppression of the 'missing telegrams', had the committee recommended this course of action. They failed to do so, and when Labouchere subsequently raised the issue in the Commons he was informed that the opportunity had passed.

Rhodes's name be removed from the list of Privy Councillors. Finally, the notion of compelling Hawksley to appear before the House and produce the 'missing telegrams' was rejected for the reasons already stipulated – namely their questionable value – and on the grounds that Rhodes, not Hawksley, was responsible for their production.

The most remarkable feature of the debate was Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes as a 'man of honour'. In doing so he attacked Labouchere for his reckless accusations of financial impropriety, and reminded the House that Rhodes had been made a Privy Councillor in recognition of 'invaluable services which nothing [could] dim...' He refused to rescind the honour, declaring that Rhodes had been sufficiently punished by loss of position and reputation.

Chamberlain was clear as to his principal motive for shielding Rhodes, namely his perceived significance to the maintenance of British power in South Africa. To buttress his argument he read aloud a letter he had received from Sir John Gordon Sprigg, Rhodes's successor as Premier at the Cape. Sprigg had warned that any attempt to inflict greater punishment on Rhodes would be interpreted as a 'vindictive' action by a majority of South Africans. Instead, Sprigg argued that Rhodes ought to be 'cheered and encouraged in the great work he ha[d] undertaken in the interior of South Africa...' that he might 'offer the fruits of his labour as a rich atonement for his past offences'.¹⁰⁹ Chamberlain was equally certain as to the necessity of maintaining the Chartered Company as the instrument of British administration in Rhodesia. The extension of direct imperial rule, he warned, would meet with opposition from all quarters.

With Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes his tactical victory over Harcourt was complete. The latter had pursued the unanimous censure of Rhodes to the exclusion of all other considerations – Rhodes was to be discredited and his influence in South Africa nullified. Chamberlain's speech amounted to an apologia for an

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

imperial hero who had transgressed from an excess of zeal in the service of his country. Having admitted and received his punishment, he would be returned to South Africa where he would be expected to continue his great work for the furtherance of the Empire.

The significance of the debate in restoring Rhodes's reputation was immediately apparent. Stanhope's original motion and its subsequent amendment were heavily defeated by a margin of 304 votes to 77 and 333 votes to 74 respectively.¹¹⁰ Campbell-Bannerman had earlier warned of the 'monstrous futility' of further debate, arguing that if nothing else the committee had achieved the unanimous censure of Rhodes. He had presciently warned that the consequence of the motions' almost certain defeat 'would be to rehabilitate Mr Rhodes and set him up again on the pedestal from which the report of the Committee [had] removed him'. In the event, the motion had provoked an astonishing defence of Rhodes by the Colonial Secretary, and split the fragile coalition which had previously been unanimous in its censure.

In defending Rhodes, Chamberlain had inferred an ideological sympathy with the raiders and had endowed the actions of the conspirators with the semblance of official sanction. It not only focussed international attention on the role of the Colonial Office, it succeeded in promoting a culture of introspection by which Rhodes's guilt was diffused throughout the political and journalistic class of the country. Elements of the Liberal press turned on their own party, furious at its apparent collusion with the Government's front bench.

Under the headline 'English Humiliation and Liberal Collapse', the Radical journal *Reynolds's Newspaper* maintained that the only MPs who had done their duty was the small band of Radicals under the leadership of Labouchere, aided by the majority of Irish nationalists and by certain principled individuals. The old Liberal party, *Reynolds's* argued, was dead - its leaders 'played-out fossils'. The

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Liberal hierarchy had been 'got at', and persuaded to make common cause with the Government against the Radicals of their own party. In a later edition, the journal went so far as to suggest that the conduct of the Government could be partly excused on account of the 'weakness, folly, and cowardice' of the Opposition. The debate highlighted a growing rift between the Whig and Radical elements within the Liberal party, prompting *Reynolds's* to advocate the establishment of a 'genuinely democratic' party in British politics, which would be equally as willing to 'turn its guns on Liberal place-hunters as on Tory place-holders'.¹¹¹

The *Manchester Guardian* denounced the affair as 'the most lamentable lowering of British standards of public honour and official conduct that ha[d] ever been witnessed',¹¹² while the *Speaker* argued that Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes had cast aside the one passage in the report which was worth the paper it had been written on.¹¹³ The *Speaker's* headline: 'Rhodes Triumphant', emphasised who the journal considered to be the principal beneficiary of the latest developments:

...it is not Mr Chamberlain but Mr Rhodes who has triumphed in this miserable business... [having] received his fullest and most brilliant vindication from the lips of the Minister whom for months past he and his friends have been endeavouring to blackmail.¹¹⁴

VIII

The truncated inquiry into the Jameson Raid rendered the investigation into the causes of the Matabele Rebellion, and the Chartered Company's administration in Rhodesia all the more significant. The Imperial Government tasked Sir Richard Martin, Resident Commissioner of Rhodesia, with investigating specific

¹¹¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 1 August 1897, p.4; also, 8 August 1897, p.4.

¹¹² *Manchester Guardian*, 27 July 1897, p.6.

¹¹³ *Speaker*, 31 July 1897, pp.118-119.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

areas of the Company's administration, including most significantly: (1) the labour question, (2) the cattle question, and (3) the cause of the rebellion itself.

Chamberlain received Martin's highly critical report on 27 February 1897; however, at the Chartered Company's request its publication was deferred until the latter could undertake its own internal investigation. This did not preclude Martin's conclusions from being shared with the South Africa Committee then in session.

By mid-March rumours had begun to surface in the Liberal press that Martin's report was highly damaging to both Rhodes and the Chartered Company. The *Daily News* speculated that a system of forced labour had been instituted in Rhodesia,¹¹⁵ while the *Manchester Guardian* insisted that the report was so censorious that 'every effort' was being made to suppress its publication.¹¹⁶

In Parliament Chamberlain faced growing pressure from MPs to present the report, most notably from John Morley and from the Liberal-Unionist MP H.O. Arnold-Forster.¹¹⁷ At length Martin's report was contained within the appendix of the Select Committee's report on British South Africa, before being published - complete with the Chartered Company's reply - in the form of a Blue Book in August 1897.¹¹⁸

The report's most serious charges concerned the questions of labour and cattle. Martin concluded 'That compulsory labour did undoubtedly exist in Matabeleland, if not in Mashonaland...That the native Commissioners, in the first instance, endeavoured to obtain labour through the Indunas, but failing in this, they procured it by force.' Addressing the cattle question, Martin concluded that the

¹¹⁵ *Daily News*, 5 April 1897, p.3.

¹¹⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1897, p.7.

¹¹⁷ HC Deb 31 May 1897, Vol. 49 cc1626 – 7; also *Daily News*, 1 June 1897, p.5.

¹¹⁸ HC 311, Second Report from the Select Committee on British South Africa, 1897, App. 22, pp.614-636; see also C.8547, Report by Sir R.E.R. Martin, K.C.M.G. on the Native Administration of the British South Africa Company, 1897.

delayed, and inequitable distribution of the cattle had provoked 'widespread discontent and distrust', describing the Company's assumption that all cattle had belonged to Lobengula as a 'fatal mistake'. As to the causes of the rebellion Martin identified four distinct factors: (1) The fact that the Ndebele had never been entirely subdued, (2) the labour regulations, (3) the cattle regulations, (4) the Rinderpest and the slaughter of cattle.¹¹⁹

Responsibility for the mustering of labour in Rhodesia had fallen largely to the Company's 'native' police, who were accused of a series of abuses including intimidation, theft, and the violation of Ndebele women. The native commissioners who had jurisdiction over the police were themselves considered incompetent as a class, many being young, inexperienced, and 'not the men to win respect'.¹²⁰ Martin concluded that in the rush for gold African interests had not received the attention they deserved and that in Rhodesia 'the Native question was belittled'.¹²¹

If Martin remained cautious as to the accuracy of his findings – having conceded that the evidence upon which he had based his report was by no means exhaustive - Liberal journals did not. The *Manchester Guardian* claimed that Martin's charges had been 'proven to the hilt', and that three years of Company misrule had reduced a 'comparatively orderly people settled on the land into a horde of starving savages, wandering about the mountains and forests in fear of death or slavery'.¹²² There were renewed calls for the Company's Charter to be revoked and for the Imperial Government to increase its administrative responsibilities.

Criticism of the Company's administration reached its apotheosis in the articles of John Y.F. Blake, an Irish-American soldier who would subsequently serve with the Boers in the South African War.

¹¹⁹ HC 311, App. 22, p.614.

¹²⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1897, p.6.

¹²¹ C8547, p.11.

¹²² *Manchester Guardian*, 19 July 1897, p.4.

Blake had been lured to South Africa by its reputed mineral wealth and had been sojourning in Rhodesia at the time of the rebellion. His articles – contributed to such publications as the *Daily Chronicle* and the *National Review* – amounted to perhaps the severest criticism of the Company yet to appear in print, and served to buttress Martin's conclusions that forced labour had existed in the Company's territory, and that the Rhodesian administration was itself principally responsible for the 1896 rebellion.

Blake's articles - which he would later expand upon in his memoir *A West Pointer with the Boers* - were peppered with tales of brutality and indiscriminate murder.¹²³ The attitude of the average Rhodesian colonist, Blake explained, was that he could not enjoy his breakfast in the morning 'unless he had first sjamboked a nigger'. He told of how the authorities would order Africans shot for amusement, or else hang them from trees; of how during the rebellion a white patrol had slaughtered a party of Africans peacefully farming for mealies, and of how the white colonists would carry off Ndebele women as mistresses.

Regarding the issue of forced labour, Blake maintained that as the expiration of worker's contracts approached, unscrupulous employers would deliberately mistreat their employees in-order to drive them from their positions and so avoid paying wages. As news of this practice spread, African labour became increasingly difficult to contract, resulting finally in the intervention of the 'native' police who were prepared to employ more persuasive means to achieve their objective. Like Martin, Blake traced the prevailing ignorance of such abuses to the Company's administration, which he accused of possessing 'all the essentials of a despotism'.¹²⁴

The Company's official rejoinder, composed by Lord Grey - the incumbent Administrator of Rhodesia - was widely criticised in the

¹²³ Blake, John .Y.F., *A West Pointer with the Boers*, Angel Guardian Press, Boston 1903.

¹²⁴ *National Review*, October 1897, pp.217-225 (p.218).

British press. John Morley declared that Grey's defence had left 'the substance and body' of Martin's allegations 'exactly where they were',¹²⁵ while the Administrators indignant response reminded the *Manchester Guardian* of a frustrated defendant who, upon conviction, might remove his boots to throw at the magistrate. The journal felt sure that the British public would have 'no difficulty in assessing the relative values of the judicial statement of the Colonial Office's Commissioner and the *ex parte* statement of the incriminated Company'.¹²⁶

Grey was accused of having quibbled over charges demanding the severest censure. Far from constituting an unqualified denial of the accusations made against the Company's administration, he and his witnesses equivocated, drawing subtle distinctions between compulsory labour and the threat of physical force. *The Times* struck at the heart of the issue when it accused Grey of having framed his apologia of the Company 'rather in the nature of a dextrous Parliamentary speech than of a convincing defence upon its merits'.¹²⁷

Martin's report was unquestionably damaging to Rhodes. The Chartered Company had been found partially responsible for inciting the rebellion of 1896 - provoking in-turn a catalogue of accusations against Company officials in the press. Moreover, it had succeeded in demonstrating that forced labour had been practiced in Rhodesia. Yet the Chartered Company endured - notwithstanding the implementation of administrative reforms - and Rhodes's reputation among his contemporaries survived largely intact.

A number of mitigating factors contributed to this outcome. In the first instance Martin's report was criticised by contemporaries for its lack of corroborating evidence. *The Times* argued that the report was 'not a judgement or even an impeachment supported by evidence,

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 29 September 1897, p.4.

¹²⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 July 1897, p.7.

¹²⁷ *The Times*, 29 July 1897, p.9.

but a very clear and decided statement of the inference drawn by an official chosen by the Imperial Government to investigate the facts'.¹²⁸ The *Morning Post* concurred, arguing that Martin had relied too heavily on the testimony of key witnesses:

When we find that Sir Richard is obliged to fall back for confirmatory evidence as to enforced work on the somewhat loose and unsigned statement that "there is no doubt compulsory labour did exist", the most bitter opponents of the Chartered Company's administration can hardly congratulate the Deputy Commissioner on the weight of his conclusions.¹²⁹

The accusations of critics were effectively counteracted by the Company's associates. F.C. Selous and Hugh Marshal Hole, a prominent Rhodesian administrator, both took issue with the articles of John Y.F. Blake. Hole's article, *Native Rhodesia: A Rejoinder* was published in the *National Review* of November 1897,¹³⁰ while Selous would make his case in a long letter to *The Times* published a month later.¹³¹

Three issues dominated the debate: the issue of forced labour, the alleged murder of a group of unarmed Ndebele civilians during the siege of Bulawayo, and the treatment of Ndebele women by the Rhodesian colonists. Both Hole and Selous complained that in the hands of British Radicals isolated incidents of abuse had been misrepresented as Company policy. '...no calumny cast upon Britons who have fought and bled for the Empire in far away Matabeleland', Selous complained, 'could be too gross for eager acceptance by the Radical press of this country, or by politicians such as Messrs' Labouchere and Morley'.¹³²

Hole admitted that prior to the rebellion 'a few low and dishonest prospectors [had] ill-used their native employees towards the end of their contracted terms, with a view to driving them away and so

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Morning Post*, 27 July 1897, p.4.

¹³⁰ *National Review*, November 1897, pp.354-359.

¹³¹ *The Times*, 22 December 1897, p.7.

¹³² *Ibid.*

evading payment'; however, he rejected the notion that the method was widespread or that the Company wilfully connived in such practices. The wider community, he argued, condemned the mistreatment of Africans if only for the expedient that the ill-treatment of workers would exacerbate the labour shortage.¹³³

Addressing the accusation that a Company patrol had opened fire on a party of Africans farming for mealies, Hole accused Blake of 'idiotic gullibility', noting that at the time of the siege all women and children were cowering in their kraals, and thus hardly likely to be engaged in the peaceful act of hoeing.¹³⁴ Selous called the allegation a 'base, cruel, and malignant falsehood', stating categorically that the sorties launched from Bulawayo had been few in number and that all had fallen under the direction of a responsible officer. 'I wish to force this man to prove that what he has written is true, or else make him eat his words', Selous declared. 'I say that he is circulating falsehoods, and defy him to make good his accusation of wholesale murder of women and children against a party of British colonists.'¹³⁵

Selous had his own reminiscences about the siege of Bulawayo, and proceeded to recount how a member of his patrol had tended an Ndebele woman injured in the cross-fire,¹³⁶ while Hole reminded his readers of the thousands of Africans who had filed into Bulawayo to receive doles of mealies to stave off hunger.¹³⁷ This, the Rhodesians argued, was the true face of the Company's administration.

Blake's saintly portrayal of the Ndebele was fiercely contested by Selous who insisted that their history had been 'one long ceaseless story of cruelty and bloodshed'. Ndebele women, he insisted, were so notoriously immoral and avaricious as to render their procurement by Europeans effortless. Charges of violation and forcible abduction

¹³³ *National Review*, November 1897, pp.354-359.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *The Times*, 22 December 1897, p.7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *National Review*, November 1897, pp.354-359.

were considered 'altogether absurd'.¹³⁸ Hole concurred, conceding that while 'base acts may have been perpetrated by a few of the lowest characters among them', the accusation that such abuses were common was considered a 'horrible slur'.¹³⁹

The notion that a conspiracy of silence prevailed in Rhodesia was dismissed as yet another fabrication. Between 20 November 1896 and the end of February 1897 a local commission had sat in Bulawayo to gather evidence for the Parliamentary Select Committee and no such complaints had been registered. The regions missionaries had not reported any systemic abuse of power, nor had the Rhodesian press. Why is it, Hole asked, 'that Mr Blake stands alone, save for the authoress of "Trooper Halkett", as the one bright champion of humanitarianism in these dark regions'.¹⁴⁰ A lack of corroborating evidence in support of the Company's critics was seen, not as evidence of a conspiracy to conceal abuses of power, but as an *argumentum ex silentio* for the administration's good governance.

Grey's much-maligned report was also not without its redeeming features. He succeeded in contradicting the notion that physical coercion was Company policy, explaining that constables and officials engaged in such practices would be 'severely punished'. Moreover, Grey understood that imperial necessity and fiscal responsibility would weigh heaviest with Chamberlain, and accordingly made such considerations a key feature of his defence. Critics were reminded that Rhodes and Beit had personally sustained the administration of Rhodesia 'for some considerable time', thus sparing the imperial exchequer. Considering the difficulties attendant upon establishing a new administration with limited funds over a vast country, Grey declared himself 'astonished' at the Chartered Company's achievements.¹⁴¹ In this context the recognised abuses

¹³⁸ *The Times*, 22 December 1897, p.7.

¹³⁹ *National Review*, November 1897, pp.354-359.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ C.8547, pp.50-51.

appeared to stem more from the inevitable deficiencies of an infant administration than from institutional malevolence.

IX

A series of events at the end of 1897 served to highlight the remarkable degree to which Rhodes's reputation had survived the trials of the preceding months. The first of these was the opening ceremony of the Bulawayo railway on 4 November 1897. The new line which stretched from Cape Town through Kimberley, Vryburg, and Mafeking had finally reached Bulawayo. The *St James's Gazette* estimated that the railway would reduce travel time between Cape Town and Bulawayo from seven or eight days to eighty hours. The cost, formerly £32, in future would not exceed a third of that sum.¹⁴²

With the opening of the new railway the travel time between London and Bulawayo would be reduced to just three weeks. With this development came the expectation that at last the true value of Rhodesia would be revealed. The railway would enable heavy machinery to be transported north for the development of both the mines and the country's infrastructure; Rhodesian produce would be opened to the markets of the world, and the inevitable increase of settlers and visitors would furnish stay-at-home Englishmen with a more accurate picture of life in the colony.

It was a time for reflection, a moment in which to take stock of the enormous strides the Chartered Company had made in the development of the colony. For the late Victorians the railway remained the great symbol of progress and modernity. Its arrival in the Rhodesian town of Bulawayo, a mere four years after the fall of Lobengula, was seen as indicative of the success of Britain's civilising mission in Africa. *The Times* expressed the mantra of the age when it stated that communications in the form of railways and

¹⁴² *St James's Gazette*, 4 November 1897, p.5.

telegraphs were the 'prime necessity of civilization'. The milestone of the railway having reached Bulawayo inevitably prompted comparisons between the old town and the new; as *The Times* explained:

It is but yesterday that Bulawayo was the headquarters of a powerful native despot dwelling in the apparent security of an inaccessible position. Now the powerful organization which he controlled is completely destroyed, the white man has entered in and taken possession of his vast tracts of rolling uplands, and a railway station stands in the seat of his power.¹⁴³

The *Standard* contrasted what, 'but a few months back', had been the site of an African kraal, with the 'large and well-laid out town' which now greeted visitors to Bulawayo. The journal marvelled at the buildings constructed of stone, brick, and iron - the ornamental parks, the electric lighting installation for street and private lighting, a telephone system, schools, and a fine hospital, not to mention the town's leisure facilities replete with race course, polo grounds, clubs, a public library and reading room, a Rifle Association, and a debating society.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the *Morning Post* reminded its readers that the proud new town, with its railway running through 'fair country', occupied the site 'where but a few years ago natives fought and murdered each other'.¹⁴⁵ Even the *Liberal Speaker* could not fail to acknowledge the powerful symbolism of a railway terminus occupying a site once notoriously named 'the Place of the slaughter'. After the bloodshed of war and rebellion, and the accusations of greed and exploitation, the opening of the railway symbolised imperial progress - the reward after the sacrifice. Upon surveying the progress made at Bulawayo the *Speaker* - critical of Rhodes's methods in the past - admitted to its readers that:

...the instinct of imperial expansion is not one, if it be properly followed, of which a great nation need feel itself ashamed. Civilisation, like liberty, has seen too many crimes committed in its name...But it is no dream to regard this line of

¹⁴³ *The Times*, 5 November 1897, p.9.

¹⁴⁴ *Standard*, 15 October 1897, p.3.

¹⁴⁵ *Morning Post*, 29 October 1897, p.6.

communication as the surest friend of commerce, and commerce, with all the intercourse and mutual profit it engenders, as the surest friend of peace.¹⁴⁶

There was also the obligatory comparison between the advancement of Rhodesia and the meagre progress of the Crown Colonies, all of which redounded to Rhodes's advantage. The Czech explorer Dr Emil Holub argued that if the railway had been left in government hands it would not have advanced beyond the embryonic stage, and yet here it was completed and on schedule.¹⁴⁷ Holub's British counterpart, Henry Morton Stanley, argued in his paper on the future of South Africa that Rhodes had given the Imperial Government a valuable object-lesson in the development of African colonies.¹⁴⁸

It was anticipated that the new town of Bulawayo would make a deep impression upon the African mind. After years of associating the Rhodesian settlers with war, famine, and disease, there was the belief that at last the African would learn something of the advantages of British civilisation. 'It was', the *Daily News* concluded, 'the white man as magician and miracle worker in the arts, as ruler and lawgiver, and not merely as the victor in fight.'¹⁴⁹

The enthusiasm surrounding the opening of the railway centred upon the realisation of Rhodesia's economic prospects. *The Times* imagined the railway running like a fertile stream through the heart of the country, 'multiplying in every direction at once the value of what the region offers and the efficiency of the efforts put forth for its improvement'. The journal informed its readers that the mines would no longer stand idle for want of machinery, the agricultural enterprise need not run to nothing for want of markets, and settlers would no longer be discouraged for fear of food prices and starvation.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ *Speaker*, 13 November 1897, pp.532-533 (p.532).

¹⁴⁷ *The Times*, 9 November 1897, p.5.

¹⁴⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1897, p.6.

¹⁴⁹ *Daily News*, 5 November 1897, p.7.

¹⁵⁰ *The Times*, 5 November 1897, p.9.

Writing from Bulawayo, H.M Stanley wrote a letter to the journal *South Africa*, later republished in the British press, in which he compared the development of South and Central Africa to that of the United States. There, too, railways had provided the means by which to exploit the country's natural resources, while filling up the waste lands with settlers, every one of whom was estimated to be worth £200 to the nation. Stanley extolled Rhodesia's 'vast coalfields', its stone: granite, sandstone, and trachyte, its wood, and its minerals: gold, copper, lead, and iron, and its 'enormous agricultural area'. Then there was the raw power of the Victoria Falls which, like the smaller Niagara Falls, might be harnessed to provide electrical power.¹⁵¹ The German explorer Max Schoeller, whose opinions were published in the *Observer*, shared Stanley's optimism, noting the impressive prices paid for stands at Bulawayo, indicating that it would soon take its place as one of the most important towns in South Africa.¹⁵²

Contemporaries discerned a considerable strategic advantage in the completion of the Bulawayo railway. At the time of Rhodes's visit to Paris earlier in the year, *Le Temps* had speculated as to what the new railway would mean for the balance of power in South Africa. The journal argued that having failed to take the Transvaal by force, Rhodes – 'the man of new countries, of towns raised by the magic of his will in the midst of deserts' - would now look to his new railway to flood the continent with immigrants and thereby 'swamp the old populations imbued with narrow-minded and conservative ideas...'¹⁵³ In this way it was expected that Rhodes would finally accomplish the federation of the South African states.

In the short-term the railway was expected to transform the balance of power between the Boer republics and the British colonies. The Imperialist press anticipated that the rapid

¹⁵¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1897, p.6.

¹⁵² *Observer*, 26 December 1897, p.4; also *Morning Post*, 13 November 1897, p.5.

¹⁵³ Views of *Le Temps*, quoted in the *Standard*, 10 February 1897, p.5.

development of Rhodesia, as evidenced by the arrival of the new railway would - in alliance with liberal laws and fair tariffs - make Rhodesia the principal destination for all enterprising immigrants to South Africa. 'No wonder President Kruger begins to fear the growing power of his progressive neighbour', wrote the *Morning Post*, 'In Rhodesia there are no monopolies, no State premiums on mining necessities, no unjust laws which stir up strife and encourage racial feeling. Legislation is the same for the Boer and the European, irrespective of creed and nationality.'¹⁵⁴ At the very least there was the expectation that under pressure from its progressive neighbour, the Transvaal would be compelled to reform its constitution. *The Times* reported that 'Apart from other advantages, the Bulawayo railway work[ed] powerfully for peace simply by promoting movement and inspiring hope.'¹⁵⁵

The strategic advantage of the new railway was expected to prove equally frustrating to the imperial aspirations of Britain's European rivals. In his paper on the future of South Africa, H.M. Stanley argued that any influence Germany may have hoped to exercise on South African politics had been checked 'by the insuperable barrier that has been created by those slender lines of steel between its South-west African colony and the Dutch Republics'. The railway was expected to increase the populations of Rhodesia and both the Crown Colony and Protectorate of Bechuanaland. These populous tracts of land would thus create a formidable barrier to the ambitions of rival powers. For Stanley, the railway represented a 'rampart of steel' in defence of British interests, and – in particular - signalled the end of German ambitions to challenge British paramountcy in South Africa.¹⁵⁶

The completion of the railway coincided with the end of the rebellion, which had persisted in Mashonaland beyond the

¹⁵⁴ *Morning Post*, 29 October 1897, p.6.

¹⁵⁵ *The Times*, 5 November 1897, p.9.

¹⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1897, p.6.

conclusion of Rhodes's famous indaba. The concurrence of the two events was not lost on the Company's officials. At the opening ceremony Sir Richard Martin spoke of the railway as a symbol of peace, and of a new beginning. Martin assured his audience that the railway would also work for peace in a practical sense by forming a key component of Rhodesia's defences, ensuring 'absolute safety for prospectors throughout Rhodesia'.¹⁵⁷

Emphasis was again placed on the humanitarian benefits of imperial progress. Africans still reeling from the effects of the rinderpest cattle disease were also expected to derive trading benefits from the new line. The Czech explorer, Dr Holub, explained to *The Times* that Rhodes's concession regarding the free carriage of firewood for six months – then considered the Bechuana's principal trading commodity – meant that the latter would be able to dispose of their wares at Kimberley and so escape the famine which had so recently ravaged the other tribes.¹⁵⁸ Holub was himself echoing the sentiments of the new High Commissioner Alfred Milner who, at the opening ceremony, had declared that the new railway had the means of rescuing thousands of Africans from starvation.¹⁵⁹

In spite of Rhodes's absence from the opening ceremony due to ill-health, there was little danger that either the assembled dignitaries or the commentators at home, would fail to acknowledge to whom they owed this monumental achievement. The *Morning Post* quipped that for the opening ceremony to take place without Rhodes was akin to the play of *Hamlet* being acted without Hamlet,¹⁶⁰ while W.T. Stead noted that Rhodes's absence was more conspicuous than the presence of all those who had gathered to celebrate the opening combined. Of the dignitaries present Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, Governor of Natal, and the Conservative MP, William Hayes Fisher,

¹⁵⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 November 1897, p.7.

¹⁵⁸ *The Times*, 9 November 1897, p.5.

¹⁵⁹ *Morning Post*, 12 November 1897, p.7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*: 29 October 1897, p.6.

'referred in glowing terms to the great qualities of Mr Cecil Rhodes and his services to the British Empire'.¹⁶¹

Rhodesia's emergence as a tangible asset brought Rhodes's contribution to the British Empire into sharper focus. It also elicited a spirit of reconciliation. In his address to the National Union, Ashmead-Bartlett epitomised the prevailing sentiment, informing his audience that the 'genius and statesmanship of the great Englishman, Mr Cecil Rhodes...[had] secured British ascendancy in South Africa, and made a British trans-African Empire from South to North not only possible but probable'. He insisted that in light of Rhodes's achievements the British people would be only too willing to forgive the faults he had committed in their name, an assertion which received the enthusiastic approval of those assembled. Bartlett's remarks were seconded by Colonial Institute fellow, A. De Sales Turland, who argued that the British people would reflect with gratitude that they had recourse to such a man as Cecil Rhodes to defend their interests in South Africa. Not only had he opened up the markets of Rhodesia, in thwarting imperial rivals he had preserved British hegemony.¹⁶²

In keeping with this spirit of reconciliation much of the imperialist press was willing to argue that Rhodesia's recent troubles stemmed from poor communications, and the difficulties liable to arise when an inadequate administration attempts to govern a vast country; as the *Morning Post* observed:

No doubt there have been instances of individual cruelty and oppression, but when the vast extent of Rhodesia is remembered, and the incomplete condition of the Government taken into consideration, it is wonderful that such cases have not been more numerous. At any rate, the railway is the best remedy...¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 November 1897, p.7.

¹⁶² *Morning Post*, 18 November 1897, p.6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*: 12 November 1897, p.7.

Contemporaries had long recognised the durability of Rhodes's reputation, and with the completion of the railway and the development of Rhodesia, this willingness to forgive past offences became increasingly intelligible. At its heart was Rhodes's willingness and ability to advance the imperial cause; as H.M. Stanley explained:

I know no man who occupies such a place in men's thoughts...he has so planted himself in the affections of the people that no eccentricity of his can detract from his merits. When a man scatters £200,000 a year on the country out of which he made his wealth it covers a multitude of sins in the minds of the recipients of his gratuitous favours.¹⁶⁴

Amidst general acclamation there were the occasional expressions of concern. Critics argued that Rhodesia was being sold to the unsuspecting public as a 'ready-made paradise'. In reality the prospects for settlers without substantial capital were limited, the cost of living was high, and food remained scarce. In consequence, the Bishop of Mashonaland and the secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association had both issued warnings to colonists from the South not to travel to Rhodesia without ample funds.¹⁶⁵

There were concerns, too, for the economic prospects of the colony. Critics pointed out that the railway rates in Rhodesia were often three times as high as those of the much maligned Netherlands Railway serving the Transvaal. Existing rates made the cost of both living and construction exorbitantly high. In addition, the Company's policy of appropriating up to 50% of the profits of all mines privately worked - or 50% of the vendors scrip or cash, should a company be floated - was heavily criticised. Despite the opening of the railway the Company's opponents continued to warn speculators not to invest in Chartered shares. *Reynolds's Newspaper* reported that 'Chartered's' were no closer to their goal of £5 shares than they had been before the opening of the railway. The journal warned its readers that

¹⁶⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1897, p.6.

¹⁶⁵ *Standard*, 5 October 1897, p.3; also *Manchester Guardian*, 6 October 1897, p.10.

'Rhodesians are still and must be, until some payable gold reefs are discovered, simply gambling counters, best left alone by those who cannot afford to lose smiling...Let speculators be wary.'¹⁶⁶

Advocates of the new railway both in Rhodesia and at the Cape anticipated that its completion would affect the expansion of their domestic markets. Critics questioned the accuracy of such predictions. Commenting on the prospective trading relationship between Rhodesia and the Cape the *Manchester Guardian's* South African contributor concluded:

It is quite probable that it will do neither one thing nor the other. Certainly if the settlers in Rhodesia can raise anything cheaply enough to make it worth their while to export it, they will not be likely to give such prices for Cape produce as will justify its conveyance over 1,600 miles of railway.¹⁶⁷

Fears for the economic development of Rhodesia formed part of a broader concern for the development of South Africa itself. Overreliance on the gold industry appeared to be having a deleterious effect on the development of the South African economy. Sheep farming, the tea industry, fruit growing, the sugar industry, were said to have made the slowest progress or had regressed. The *Manchester Guardian's* South African contributor described the region's economy as a 'pyramid standing upon its apex', progress in other fields having been sacrificed for the benefit of the mining industry. Farmers had been lured away from the land to invest their time and capital in mining speculations with mixed results. There were concerns that as pressure mounted for rates and tariffs to be reduced further, more mining concerns would become payable, thereby exacerbating the existing crisis. Falling government revenues would prevent the construction of valuable infrastructure for South African industry. In this context the strengthening of Rhodes's position, the development of the Rhodesian mining industry and the

¹⁶⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 14 November 1897, p.6; also *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 March 1898, p.5.

¹⁶⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 30 September 1897, p.12.

increased pressure this would bring to bear on the Transvaal was seen as a step closer to the domination of South Africa by the Randlords.¹⁶⁸

Such criticisms notwithstanding, the opening of the Bulawayo railway showcased Rhodesia as a young, prosperous state that was open for business. It would be a producer of raw materials, and a new market for Imperial goods. It would ensure British hegemony in South Africa, and by demoralizing imperial rivals and overawing the indigenous population, usher in a new era of peace and security. It was, above all, a reaffirmation of Britain's imperial mission as evidenced by the construction of a modern town with all amenities and conveniences upon an area of ground once known as the 'place of the killing', the replacement of a despot's kraal with a railway terminus, and the triumph of civilisation over barbarism. Rhodes was credited for having the vision, energy and wealth to secure South Africa for the British race, despite opposition from imperial rivals and a parsimonious, vacillating Imperial government. In spite of wars, raids, and rebellions, Rhodes's personal stock remained stubbornly high. The notion that the Jameson Raid and its subsequent inquiry dealt a fatal blow to the public perception of so-called 'Stock Exchange imperialism' is not borne out by this evidence.

The durability of Rhodes's reputation was also in evidence in London that autumn. Among the most 'picturesque' floats to feature in the Lord Mayor's parade was one entitled 'Founders of Greater Britain.' The car featured a group of actors representing the men who had laid the foundations of the British Empire. Occupying a prominent place in the car alongside representations of Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Clive, and Warren Hastings, was Cecil Rhodes. It was another indication that Rhodes - in spite of his errors - had received the validation of officialdom. It was also a further indication that those in authority believed, like Chamberlain himself, that their decisions

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

carried with them popular approval. As the float passed by there was great acclamation, and for the assembled journalists there was little doubt as to which figure represented the principal object of the crowd's admiration; as the *Morning Post* reported:

...the people of the City of London cheered right heartily, and that their plaudits were mainly intended for one man was patent from the fact that every now and then a cry of "Hurrah for Rhodes!" or "Bravo Rhodes!" was raised.¹⁶⁹

The Lord Mayor's parade in London coincided with the publication of George Griffith's *Men who have made the Empire*.¹⁷⁰ Griffith's book was divided into twelve chapters, each detailing the life of a great imperial hero, including such luminaries as James Cook, Lord Nelson, and General Gordon. Griffith's final 'word-portrait' was of Cecil Rhodes, hailed by the author as the 'greatest Englishman of his day'.

At the time Griffith enjoyed a literary reputation - most notably in the field of science fiction - which was comparable, in Britain at least, to that of Olive Schreiner. Griffith exemplified the fact that at the end of the nineteenth century faith in the Imperial idea was a broad church. Identified as a Fabian Socialist, Griffith stressed both the regenerative and modernising forces of Imperialism. The traditional (or classical) view that capitalism acted as a necessary bridge to socialism still held sway, as did the notion that Imperialism was the pioneer of capitalism, and that socialism flourished within such a system.¹⁷¹

In his foreword to *Men who have made the Empire*, Griffith espoused a belief in Imperialism which would unquestionably have struck a chord with all contemporary believers in the 'Imperial idea:'

¹⁶⁹ *Morning Post*, 5 November 1897, p.7; *The Times*, 5 November 1897, p.7; *Standard*, 10 November 1897, p.5.

¹⁷⁰ Griffith, George, *Men who have made the Empire*, C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. London 1899, first published 1897.

¹⁷¹ Warren, Bill, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, Verso, London 1980.

The making of a nation and the building of nations up into empires is, humanly speaking, the greatest and noblest work that human hands and brains can find to do, for the making of an empire means, in its ultimate analysis, the substitution of order for anarchy, of commerce for plunder, of civilization for savagery – in a word, of peace for strife.¹⁷²

It was this vision of Empire which inspired contemporaries, and not the prospect, as Labouchere might have argued, of creating a few more Park Lane millionaires. Griffith's argument for Empire was a familiar one: territory was required to provide homes for a surplus population, international competition required Britain to defend her interests against imperial rivals, all in pursuit of that most noble of objectives - the Pax Britannica, which would ultimately bring to fruition 'The Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World'. As the Contemporary writer Elie Halévy would later argue:

Not for a single moment could the imperialism of the government programme have awakened the enthusiasm of the masses, if it had been nothing more than a manifestation of commercial greed, and had not contained a very considerable element of idealism.¹⁷³

Griffith's biographical sketch portrayed Rhodes as a selfless patriot who saw the acquisition of money not as an end in itself, but as a means by which to raise new nations. It presented Rhodes as the one Englishman who could command the support of both the Cape Afrikaners and the indigenous tribes of Rhodesia - rendering him vital to the maintenance of peace in South Africa. Moreover, Griffith insisted that the efforts of all the humanitarian societies combined 'would not amount to a tithe of what Cecil Rhodes ha[d] done for the natives of South Africa'.¹⁷⁴ Through the development of the compound system and through his policies as Prime Minister of the Cape - most notably the Glen Grey Act - Griffith argued that Rhodes had civilised thousands of Africans by converting them into sober and hard-working subjects.

¹⁷² Griffith, p.xiv.

¹⁷³ Halévy, p.18.

¹⁷⁴ Griffith: p.301.

The year 1897, for all its trials, had ended triumphantly for Rhodes. From Bulawayo to Cape Town to London his reputation, in spite of myriad assaults, had proved remarkably durable. Rhodes's critics might reasonably have supposed that 1897 would be remembered as the year in which Rhodes fell from grace, exposed as the principal conspirator behind an armed insurrection against a friendly state, as a 'stock-jobber', and enslaver. Yet by the year's end he had survived the most damaging accusations of his opponents, he had received a character reference from the Colonial Secretary, his doppelganger had been paraded through the streets of London in triumph, he had featured prominently in a compendium of Britain's greatest imperial heroes by one of the most popular authors of the day, and for his work in pioneering Rhodesia he had been lauded as the man responsible for carrying civilisation into the heart of Africa, and assuring British domination of half a continent.

Chapter 8

'I give myself four thousand years'

The optimism which had characterised the final months of 1897 continued into the New Year. The controversy surrounding the London inquiry into the Jameson Raid had abated and there were promising signs that Britain, in Chamberlain's words, might once again 'take up the thread of [her] South African policy with every hope of weaving it into a satisfactory web'.¹

In the Transvaal the Kruger administration had repealed the Aliens Immigration Law and amended the Aliens Expulsion Law, legislation the Imperial Government considered to be in contravention of the London convention. As the progressive party in the Transvaal continued to grow further reforms were eagerly anticipated.²

In Rhodesia, the arrival of the railway appeared to signal the beginning of a new and prosperous chapter in the colony's development. In April 1898 the *Saturday Review* expressed the belief 'that at last the great difficulties in the way of its development [had] been overcome'. This success was attributed 'in great part to Mr Rhodes's genius and energy...' Rhodesia, the journal predicted, was 'about to assume its rightful place as an integral part of the Empire'.³

At the Cape there were also signs of conciliation. In January *The Times* reported that a resolution had been unanimously carried at a meeting of the Afrikaner Bond to the effect that its members should not work for the severance of the British connection but for its maintenance.⁴ The sharpening divide between the British and Dutch communities, however, was less encouraging, even if a by-product of

¹ HC Deb 26 July 1897, Vol. 51 cc1093-182; also *The Times*, 27 July 1897, p.6.

² *The Times*, 6 January 1898, p.10.

³ *Saturday Review*, 16 April 1898, pp.509-512.

⁴ *The Times*, 17 January 1898, p.5.

this development was that British South Africa appeared more united in its support of Rhodes and more conscious of imperial interests than ever before.

II

Prior to the Raid there had been three major political groupings at the Cape: the Rhodes group, dominated by ideas of imperial or colonial expansion, but outwardly sympathetic to the policies of the Afrikaner Bond as a means of retaining political influence; the Progressive group, or the Opposition, which opposed the Bond's Conservatism and mistrusted Rhodes because of his subservience to the Bond; and finally, the Bond itself. Tamarkin has argued that the founding of the Afrikaner Bond reflected the emergence of a Cape Afrikaner ethnic consciousness rather than the emergence of Pan Afrikaner nationalism; however, this did not prevent their British contemporaries from questioning the Bond's loyalty to the Crown.⁵

After the Raid these three groupings underwent a reformation. The Rhodes group and the Bond became sharply divided. Both of these groups gained strength at the expense of the old progressives - or moderates as they were to become known - led by James Rose Innes. The Rhodes group, which styled themselves as progressives, gained British imperialists from the moderates who had once opposed the former on account of their alliance with the Bond. The Bond gained from the moderates by detaching from them Afrikaners who were now willing to prioritise ethnic loyalty.⁶

Cape politics remained 'a vital component [of Rhodes's] grand imperial design', namely the unification of South Africa under the British flag. 'The Bond, with its post-raid pro-Transvaal inclination

⁵ Tamarkin, pp.48-49.

⁶ *Westminster Review*, August 1898, pp.117-128.

was clearly not a vehicle for implementing such a strategy.⁷ This was the principal motivation behind Rhodes's political comeback, which he marked with a speech at the Good Hope Hall, Cape Town on 12 March 1898. Setting forth the Progressive programme, Rhodes explained that an initial objective would be the union of the British states: Cape Colony, Natal, and Rhodesia. The Boer republics: the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were to be drawn in later.⁸

Domestically, the Rhodes party opposed duties on dietary staples, favoured compulsory education permissive by district, restrictions on the sale of liquor to Africans, an annual contribution to the imperial navy, and the promotion of closer relations with Rhodesia. In contrast, Rhodes characterised the Bond's position as 'non-education, drunken coloured labour, anti-Fleet vote, anti-the-North, favourable to the present policy in the Transvaal...'⁹

In the first round of elections for the legislative council (the upper House), Rhodes's Progressives secured a 14 against 9 victory in an assembly of 23 members. In Britain the imperialist press delighted in the news. '...the progressive policy leads to federalism and union', *The Times* explained, 'and the reactionary policy leads to provincialism and isolation'.¹⁰ Rhodes had come to personify imperial interests, just as the Bond and Krugerism had become synonymous terms. 'The Progressive Party means the Rhodes Party, and the Rhodes Party means the Imperial Party', the *Morning Post* asserted. His victory meant more than the defeat of a political rival, it meant 'good-bye to Mr Kruger and his emissaries, who have been endeavouring to sow sedition in the minds of the Cape Boers'.¹¹

The euphoria, however, was short lived. Later in the year a vote of no confidence in the Sprigg Government triggered a general election for the House of Assembly (the lower House). The bitterly contested

⁷ Tamarkin, pp.269 – 270.

⁸ Vindex, pp.520 – 547.

⁹ Ibid. p.531.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 4 April 1898, p.10.

¹¹ *Morning Post*, 4 April 1898, p.6.

election resulted in a closing of the political ranks at the Cape and the emergence of two distinct blocs which were – with notable exceptions on both sides – divided along ‘racial’ lines. For the Progressives and their supporters in Britain the election represented a struggle for the maintenance of British supremacy, electoral reform, and opposition to the local application of ‘Krugerism’, specifically the domination of rural Afrikaner interests. For the Bond, the election meant opposing the power of monopoly capitalism as embodied by Rhodes, and the defence of Afrikaner economic and cultural interests.

In the event the Bond won the election by one seat, despite polling significantly fewer votes. *The Times* reported that 40 Bondsmen had been elected with 36,000 votes, against 39 Progressives with 50,000 votes, and branded the electoral process at the Cape ‘indefensible’.¹² The new High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, estimated the disparity to be 44,403 votes to 37,901 in favour of Rhodes, demonstrating that the Progressives had secured a significant share of the Afrikaner vote.¹³

W.P. Schreiner, the man selected to lead the parliamentary ‘Afrikaner Party’ by Jan Hofmeyr, duly formed a Government in October 1898. Rhodes himself had been re-elected for Barkly West, however, the defeat of the Progressives ensured that he would end his political career in opposition.

In Britain, where the Cape election had generated unprecedented public interest, the post mortem into the defeat of the Progressives reflected negatively on Rhodes. According to Leopold Maxse, it was ‘generally agreed’ by ‘all serious people in England’, that Rhodes and Sprigg - aided and abetted by Milner - had committed a tactical error in declaring the election to be a struggle for ascendancy between the British and Afrikaner communities. *The Times* declared that the

¹² *The Times*, 8 November 1898, p.7.

¹³ Tamarkin, p.289.

Progressives' 'battle-cry' of 'the Queen's supremacy' had been a 'positive hindrance to the party', having galvanised the opposition.¹⁴ The *Saturday Review* was closer to the truth in stating that the election had not turned on the issue of British supremacy, 'but on the personality of Mr Rhodes and all that it implies'.¹⁵

Whether Rhodes had been an asset to the Progressives or the cause of their defeat was subject to debate. Some commentators believed Rhodes had played too prominent a role. A contributor to the *New Review* argued that ever since the Raid Rhodes had worked at concealing his political identity in good works, only to reappear as the 'apostle of constitutional Imperialism'. Had he held aloof from the campaign and offered the electorate a scheme of reform and practical development, there was a sense that the result may have been different. As it was, 'in the stress of battle he [had thrown] aside his cloak and stood revealed – the same Cecil Rhodes, imperious, autocratic, fretting alike at Imperial control and popular guidance'. In revealing his ambitions to the Afrikaners he had reanimated their suspicions and damned the Progressives' cause by the 'ill-timed obtrusion of his own personality'.¹⁶

An opposing school of thought held that Rhodes had not figured prominently enough. The *Morning Post* argued that his skulking behind the scenes had helped no one; it did not conciliate the Dutch who were opposed to him and had denied his own followers of his presence.¹⁷ Neither interpretation enhanced Rhodes's political reputation.

The defeat also undermined Rhodes's reputation as the champion of black South Africans. An assessment of demographic voting patterns suggested that the African vote – such as it was – had largely voted for the Bond. In an interview with the *Daily News*, Rev.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 24 August 1898, p.7.

¹⁵ *Saturday Review*, 3 September 1898, p.298.

¹⁶ *New Century Review*, November 1898, pp.403-411.

¹⁷ *Morning Post*, 11 October 1898, p.3.

J.S. Moffat, son of the famous missionary Robert Moffat, logically attributed this development to the policies previously pursued by Rhodes and Sprigg, including measures intended to deprive Africans of their arms, raising the monetary requirement for the franchise from £25 to £75 per annum, and the Glen Grey Act. It was also recognised that while the Bond as a party was generally hostile to Africans, their parliamentary leader, W.P. Schreiner, was a renowned sympathiser.¹⁸

In Britain, imperial considerations predominated, and to a significant extent this prompted a philosophical response to the defeat of the Progressives which succeeded in cushioning Rhodes's fall. The overriding concern in Britain was for the restoration of harmonious relations with the Transvaal, and there were many on both sides of the political spectrum who considered a Bond victory conducive to this objective. The *Saturday Review* reasoned that with Hofmeyr and Schreiner in power at the Cape, Kruger would have less reason to be suspicious: 'Out of evil...it is possible there may come good.'¹⁹ Even the *Standard* conceded that a moderate administration led by Rose Innes or W.P. Schreiner would be preferable to a Rhodes ministry:

If we could choose we might prefer not to see the Boer oligarchy either exasperated by the triumph of its *bête noir*, or unduly elated by the success of its friends.²⁰

The Radical press went further, insisting that a Progressive victory would have initiated Civil War at the Cape, and been tantamount to a declaration of war against the Transvaal. The *Manchester Guardian* argued that the election had been Rhodes's attempt to secure the backing of the Cape Colony 'in an attempt to drag England into another Boer War',²¹ while *Reynolds's Newspaper* warned its readers

¹⁸ *Daily News*, 9 November 1898, p.5.

¹⁹ *Saturday Review*, 3 September 1898, p.298.

²⁰ *Standard*, 5 August 1898, p.4.

²¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 26 August 1898, p.5.

that 'Rhodes is for a policy that means conflict between English and Dutch, while his opponents are for peace and harmony.'²²

Despite their well-publicised antipathy to Rhodes it is possible to discern a note of ambivalence in the Liberal reaction to the Bond's victory. As the *Daily News* acknowledged, it was impossible for British Liberals to truly sympathise with the 'Toryism' of Schreiner or, for that matter, the 'reactionary oligarchy of Kruger'.²³ British Liberals opposed the Bond's 'native' policy, its opposition to Free Trade and universal education, its placement of duties on foodstuffs, and its resistance to electoral reform. Irrespective of the Bond's domestic policies, the *Speaker* correctly perceived that Liberals at home would sacrifice their principles in pursuance of the larger object of preserving peace in South Africa.²⁴ Moreover, it was possible to portray Rhodes's Party as the advocate of the capitalist interest, question its 'progressive' label and downplay the Bond's conservatism.²⁵

The effects of the defeat were also mitigated by the Bond's conciliatory attitude. One of Schreiner's first acts as Premier was to announce an annual contribution of £30,000 to the Royal Navy. There was also little reason to suggest that Schreiner would be any more tolerant of Transvaal meddling at the Cape than Rhodes, having demonstrated his willingness to prevent Transvaal interference with northern trade expansion in the past. Finally, there was the recognition that Rhodes's Party held the Upper House, which included the power of veto over the Assembly. This fact, allied to the Bond's slender majority suggested that the Progressives would soon profit decisively from electoral reform.

The failure of his political comeback did not fundamentally alter British perceptions of Rhodes. His defeat had provided cause for

²² *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 September 1898, p.4.

²³ *Daily News*, 21 September 1898, p.4.

²⁴ *Speaker*, 3 September 1898, pp.279-280.

²⁵ See for example *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 September 1898, p.4.

celebration in certain quarters and had been greeted with equanimity in others. Few considered the maintenance of imperial supremacy to be dependent upon Rhodes's victory, on the contrary, it was feared that such an outcome might prove injurious to imperial interests. For a majority of Britons the overriding concern was for the stability of the Empire, support for Rhodes appeared conditional upon his ability to advance that cause.

For Rhodes's staunchest supporters there was also the consolation that his party had polled the greatest share of the vote, including a large number of Afrikaners, serving to demonstrate that he retained his old powers of conciliation. There was the expectation that a Redistribution Bill must follow and that ultimately this would tilt the balance of power in Rhodes's favour.²⁶ This belief was articulated by J.S. Moffat, who argued that ultimately the Cape colonists would return to Rhodes – South Africa's one true statesman.²⁷

III

Between his party's Legislative Council victory and its defeat in the Assembly elections later that year, Rhodes returned to Britain in the spring of 1898. On 21 April 1898 he addressed a meeting of Chartered Company shareholders, in an event *The Times* characterised as being of 'international importance'.

In his speech Rhodes informed the shareholders that in 1896 revenue had exceeded expenditure for the first time. In addition, the new railway to Bulawayo was said to be earning £40,000 per annum in excess of the 5% interest on its cost. Encouraged by the profitability of the new line Rhodes announced that he had applied to the British Government for a guarantee which would cover the cost of

²⁶ A modest Redistribution Bill did follow, however, this served to marginally increase the Bond's advantage.

²⁷ *Daily News*, 9 November 1898, p.5.

extending the railway to Lake Tanganyika. A further highlight was the announcement that the Unionist Government had accepted Rhodes's proposal that the duty on British goods entering Rhodesia should not exceed the existing Cape tariff. By the meetings end Rhodes and Maguire had secured their re-elections to the Company's board and the Company's capital had been increased to £5,000,000 by the creation of 1,500,000 new £1 shares.²⁸

In the weeks that followed the Imperial Government would reiterate its support for Rhodes and the work of the Chartered Company. Addressing the annual meeting of the Primrose League at the Royal Albert Hall, Lord Salisbury claimed that Rhodes had been 'animated by the spirit by which the league was founded...' He had reclaimed vast territories to civilization and exterminated terrible evils, work which had been 'in the highest sense a supreme blessing to the dearest interests of mankind'.²⁹ Echoing Salisbury's sentiments in the House of Commons, Chamberlain once again acknowledged the supreme difficulties attendant upon the creation of a new administration over a country half as large as Europe: 'When I think of what has been done, I am not so much surprised that here and there it has broken down, as I am that there has been any success at all.'³⁰

The remarks came as Opposition members prepared to take issue with the articles of Rhodes's speech. The predominant mood among Opposition members was that Rhodes's re-election to the Company Board would be injurious to Britain's relations with the Transvaal. Both John Ellis and Sir Robert Reid feared that in spite of the administrative reforms the Government had imposed upon the Company, Rhodes would once again assume dictatorial powers in the governance of Rhodesia. Harcourt and Labouchere protested that Rhodes's re-election would be interpreted as yet further proof of

²⁸ *The Times*, 22 April 1898, p.13.

²⁹ *Ibid*: 5 May 1898, p.7.

³⁰ HC Deb 6 May 1898, Vol. 57 cc538-652.

the Colonial Secretary's sympathy with Rhodes's policies and methods. The hasty return to the status quo was similarly discomfiting to their counterparts in the press. The *Manchester Guardian* complained:

It now stands on record that in the judgement of the British Parliament conspiracy, deception, and the crowning meanness of allowing subordinates to bear the punishment are no bar to speedy and triumphant reinstatement in power.³¹

Chamberlain defended Rhodes's re-election on the grounds that whether he occupied a titled position or was merely the 'power behind the throne', Rhodes's influence would be pervasive. It was not the duty of the Imperial Government, Chamberlain explained, to interfere with the will of the shareholders. He argued further that Rhodes's exclusion would have been tantamount to the abolition of the charter. Chamberlain also sympathised with the position of the imperialist press in believing that Rhodes remained not only an invaluable influence in the development of Rhodesia but the most capable architect of South African federation. As the *Morning Post* explained:

For the sake of British interest in South Africa it will be welcome news that Mr Rhodes is again placed in a position where he can use more directly his great influence, energy, and ability not only for the welfare of the Chartered Company, but also for securing a more important object – the Federation of South Africa under the Imperial flag.³²

Rhodes's most controversial pronouncement had been the confirmation that the Imperial Government had at last accepted his offer of a preferential tariff for British goods entering Rhodesia. The issue exposed a fault line in British politics which went right to the heart of the imperial debate. It brought into direct conflict the imperialist's commitment to ever closer union among the British colonies by means of preferential tariff, and the Liberal tradition of

³¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1898, p.9.

³² *Morning Post*, 5 February 1898, p.4.

Free Trade which had formed the backbone of the country's commercial policy for half a century.

Within days of Rhodes's speech the Imperialist Press was speculating as to the significance of the development for the unity of the Empire. It was assumed that if the Progressive Party at the Cape could unite the British colonies in South Africa, then the tariff principle that applied to one must necessarily apply to all. In this way Britain's South African colonies would follow the example already set by the Canadian Premier, Sir Wilfred Laurier, who had recently granted the mother country a preference of 25% on British goods imported into Canada. With Britain engaged in a tariff union with both Canada and South Africa, there was the expectation that the remaining dominions would soon follow.

Linked to the notion of preferential tariffs was the emerging debate concerning the use of imperial credit by the colonies as a form of recompense for the tariff advantages offered to the mother country. It was apparent that taken together such economic initiatives could lay the foundations of an imperial system of taxation, which could in-turn be linked to a common defence strategy. Commenting upon Rhodes's proposals *The Times* stated: 'It is no exaggeration to speak of the movement which has thus declared itself as a definite step towards the commercial union of the Empire.'³³

British Liberals in contrast were troubled by Rhodes's proposals. It appeared to mark the 'commencement of the Zollverein', and potentially the coup de grâce of Britain's commitment to Free Trade. Harcourt reminded Chamberlain that in the past Britain had shown a preparedness to go to war in the pursuit of an 'open door' policy. It was the proud boast of the Empire, he argued, that wherever the Union Jack flew that countries markets would be open to the world. If Canada wished to extend favourable terms to the mother country this could not be prevented, but for a British colony to set such a

³³ *The Times*, 27 April 1898, p.3.

precedent, this threatened the ideological erosion of the British commercial system. Both Harcourt and Morley questioned how Britain could insist upon an 'open port' in China or elsewhere, and insist that France, Germany, and Russia adopt a completely Free Trade policy, while permitting protectionism within her own Empire.

Chamberlain's reply was indicative of his commitment to the new imperial concept of a greater Britain. Free Trade, he insisted, would remain British policy in relation to foreign nations. The colonies, however, were to be considered 'branches of the same nation'. He reminded his counterparts that no lesser guardian of Free Trade than the Cobden Club had granted the Canadian Premier a gold medal for his fiscal policies, which the Opposition had decried as Protectionist. Perhaps, Chamberlain concluded, the Cobden Club ought to give a gold medal to Mr Rhodes also.³⁴

Once again the disunity and indecisiveness of the Liberals played into the Government's hands and undermined their opposition to Rhodes and the Chartered Company. Their failure to recommend any specific course of action against Rhodes's proposals or further reforms to the Chartered Company's administration produced an impression of aimless complaining. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* explained:

The Radicals would have made a better show last night if they had made up their minds exactly what it was that they wanted and stuck to it...Logically, [they] should demand the revocation of the Charter, but by abstaining therefrom it knocks the bottom out of [their] whole case.³⁵

In contrast the Government's policy appeared coherent and decisive. The protectionist argument in particular appeared increasingly persuasive in an atmosphere of growing uncertainty as to the global balance of power and Britain's industrial competitiveness. Commenting on the acceptance of Rhodes's tariff

³⁴ HC Deb, 6 May 1898, Vol. 57, cc538-652; also *The Times*, 7 May 1898, p.11.

³⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 May 1898, p.1.

proposals the *Morning Post* admitted: 'The fact is that the new arrangement will be as popular with the British electors as it is likely to be advantageous to the Mother Country...'³⁶

Rhodes's offer of a preferential tariff to the Mother Country is almost a forgotten detail of history, and yet to contemporaries it appeared momentarily that the Imperial Government, at Rhodes's behest, had taken a vital step towards imperial federation. To his supporters it marked the culmination of an unlikely political comeback. Within months of the South Africa Committee's adverse judgement, Rhodes had inspired the Progressive Party to victory at the Cape, secured the re-capitalisation of the Chartered Company - as well as his own re-election to the board of directors - and had captured the imagination of his countrymen with notions of trans-continental railways and the economic federation of the Empire. Such was the perceived significance of the latter contribution that the *Morning Post* concluded: 'If for nothing else, for this, at all events, Mr Rhodes's past mistake and foolish blunder deserve to be condoned and consigned to everlasting oblivion.'³⁷

The rehabilitation of Rhodes's reputation continued apace, reflected in such articles as the *Pall Mall Gazette's* 'Rhodes Repaired',³⁸ and Edward Dicey's piece for the *Fortnightly* entitled 'Rhodes Redivivus.'³⁹ Rhodes's resurgence was given visual expression in a contemporary cartoon entitled 'Bobbing up Again.' Rhodes is depicted half submerged in stormy water, his ship having evidently struck an outcrop of rocks, over which flies a banner inscribed 'The Raid.' Rhodes himself is being borne up by a number of life-preserving devices each one labelled to signify a recent triumph. The lifebuoy ring around his neck states 'BSAC Directorship', while the surrounding floats read 'More Capital', 'Vote of Confidence', 'Cape Election.' A caricature of Chamberlain in the

³⁶ *Morning Post*, 7 May 1898, p.6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 May 1898, p1.

³⁹ *Fortnightly Review*, October 1898, pp.605-619.

form of a dove flies over the scene carrying in its beak an olive branch. The caption below states: 'The recent elections at the Cape and his own re-election to the directorate of the Chartered Company have once more brought Mr Rhodes to the crest of the wave.'⁴⁰

IV

On 2 September 1898 General Herbert Horatio Kitchener defeated a vast army of Dervishes at Omdurman to complete Britain's reconquest of the Sudan. In doing so he removed the last impediment to the accomplishment of Rhodes's great imperial dream, namely the creation of a transcontinental railway and telegraph system connecting the Cape to Cairo.

The concept was not a new one. A contributor to *The Times* attributed the genesis of the idea to Tom Livingstone, son of the great missionary explorer,⁴¹ and it had been six years since *Punch* magazine's publication of the iconic 'Rhodes Colossus' cartoon, depicting a giant Rhodes bestriding the African continent with one foot planted firmly at Cape Town and the other at Cairo, holding in his hands a great telegraph line linking the two.⁴² It was only now, however, with the removal of the Dervishes in the Sudan, that the concept was brought into sharper focus.

Rhodes returned to Britain on 14 January 1899 to secure £2,000,000 of imperial credit for the completion of a railway extension from Bulawayo to Tanganyika, which he envisaged to be the first step in the realisation of his Cape to Cairo scheme. The trans-continental telegraph was to be a private enterprise, the greater part of the cost being met by Rhodes and his associates. The railway, however, would be a more ambitious undertaking. In-order to

⁴⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 April 1898, p.2.

⁴¹ *The Times*, 4 March 1899, p.15.

⁴² *Punch*, 10 December 1892, p.266.

reduce costs Rhodes sought the use of the Imperial Government's credit, thought to be a difference in interest of 3 and 5%.

The Belgian Congo and German East Africa blocked Rhodes's path to the north. For the Cape to Cairo dream to be realised, he would have to secure the acquiescence of one or other of the rival Powers. Rhodes's mission to King Leopold proved unsuccessful, for once he had been unable to 'square' his counterpart and no agreement could be reached. Undaunted Rhodes pressed on to Berlin where he would attend an interview with the German Emperor on 12 March 1899.

Rhodes's meeting with the Kaiser immediately captured the public imagination in Britain, where the imperialist press hailed the summit as Rhodes's latest propaganda coup. Indications were positive from the outset, as the two men struck up an immediate rapport. Within days an agreement was signed between Rhodes and the German Government for the construction of a telegraph line route through German East Africa.

In a matter of days Rhodes had succeeded where British diplomacy had repeatedly failed. How long, *The Times* wondered, 'would [it] have taken regular diplomatists to accomplish so much practical work'. Rhodes's personal significance was underlined by the *Daily News*, which described Rhodes as the 'romantic hero' of the Empire:

It was "Rhodes in his shirt-sleeves" who brought the Matabele War to an end. It is Mr Rhodes who has dominated Rhodesia. It is with Mr Rhodes that the German Emperor has negotiated for the Trans-African telegraph line; and it is the personality of Mr Rhodes that has raised the money for his railway schemes. He has been able to negotiate with the Kaiser as if he were accredited by a Government, and the difference between a Government guarantee and a Rhodes guarantee is only the difference between three per cent and four.⁴³

⁴³ *Daily News*, 3 May 1899, p.6.

In Britain he was credited with having strengthened the fledgling alliance between the British Empire and Germany. In the context of the Anglo-German agreement of the previous autumn, the recent co-operation of British and German capitalists in China, and the amicable discussion of events in Samoa, Rhodes's achievements in Berlin appeared to herald a new era of peaceful co-operation between the two Powers. The significance of this new development was perhaps most accurately contextualised by *Le Temps*, which had observed the rapprochement of France's great rivals with increasing anxiety:

If the negotiations undertaken by Mr Rhodes lead to a complete understanding on the railway question as well as on the telegraph, a step in advance will have been made to a new international combination which will weigh very heavily on universal policy. Here is something to give pause to those who imagine that France has only to throw the handkerchief to bring Germany repentant and humble to her feet, and who under that impression do their utmost to cause a rupture with Great Britain.⁴⁴

Just as significantly Rhodes's diplomatic success in Berlin appeared to signal the end of President Kruger's ambitions of securing a defensive alliance with Germany.⁴⁵ The *Standard* expressed the optimism surrounding the Rhodes agreement by confidently asserting that 'Henceforth Krugerism must abandon its last hope of German support, and it should see more clearly than ever the hopelessness of resisting the march of English ideas and English influence throughout the South African world.'⁴⁶

Beyond its significance in the context of international relations, there was the expectation that the Cape to Cairo line would succeed in binding the disparate parts of the African Empire together, thereby permitting the light of civilization to penetrate the darkest recesses of the continent. The Unionist MP George Wyndham described the healthy plateau which Rhodes's railway would traverse as the

⁴⁴ Views of *Le Temps*, republished in *The Times*, 18 March 1899, p.7.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 3 April 1899, p.10; also, 17 April 1899, p.7.

⁴⁶ *Standard*, 13 March 1899, p.6.

'backbone of South and Central Africa...if you construct this railway', Wyndham assured the House, 'you will give that backbone a spinal cord, and then this dark African continent, which has lain so long inert, will at last begin to live and move and have its being'.⁴⁷

Defence analysts also welcomed the Cape to Cairo line as a means of strengthening both Imperial unity and national security. 'The submarine cables are the nerves of the Empire', wrote the naval critic Archibald Hurd, 'annihilating distance and binding the mother country and her children together in face of foes as nothing else can.' Hurd's ultimate ambition was the creation of an all-British cable route which would limit the prospect of rival Powers sabotaging British communications in the event of war. In a subjoined note to Hurd's paper Rhodes explained his imperial and humanitarian motivations in constructing the line. On the one hand he considered it 'the great civiliser for Central Africa'. On the other, he declared that the 'real object of the line was of course to give England a grip of the African continent right through'.⁴⁸

Champions of the Cape to Cairo scheme were keen to emphasise its economic benefits. From an imperial perspective the line promised to open up new markets to British manufactures and the prospect of living space for the surplus population at home. The first extension from Bulawayo to Tanganyika would tap the Sanga coal beds, and timber fields north of Bulawayo, thus providing Southern Rhodesia with raw materials for its burgeoning industry. In addition, the line would place the mines and farms of Southern Rhodesia in contact with a new - and it was hoped - cheaper labour market.

Its supporters credited Rhodes's railway with solving not only the logistical difficulty of opening up the interior of the continent, but also the age-old problem of how to make Central Africa pay.⁴⁹ An anonymous humanitarian, who contributed articles to both *The Times*

⁴⁷ HC Deb 6 May 1898, Vol. 57, cc538-652.

⁴⁸ *Nineteenth Century*, February 1899, pp.226-234.

⁴⁹ *Fortnightly Review*, November 1898, pp.665-676.

and the *Morning Post*, declared that it was ‘the glorious privilege and the imperative duty of this generation of Englishmen to support Mr Rhodes in the only true Imperial policy – a policy of public works and pickaxes’. Rhodes was identified as the successor of the Livingstone’s and the Moffat’s. Having assumed the mantle of their great civilising mission, Rhodes’s scheme would end the slave trade in Africa, and finally open the interior of the continent to the influences of Christianity, commerce and civilization:

For Gordon’s sake England has reconquered the Sudan. In the name of his great compeer Livingstone, let us go forward, and for Livingstone’s sake let us build “Livingstone’s line.”⁵⁰

If supporters of the line spied the opportunity to rescue the continent from ‘savagedom’, its critics saw only the grim prospect of inflicting the rule of the Chartered Company on so many more hapless Africans. In this context the railway represented not the expansion of British liberty but of forced labour and the compound system. The *Manchester Guardian* argued that the only beneficiary of the line would be South African capitalists who, by expanding the African labour market would be able to force wages down and profits up:

How the Chartered Company deals with independent chiefs or with subjugated tribes we have all seen, and we have seen enough. If Imperial aid is asked for further extension, it should be at the price of direct administration by Imperial officials.⁵¹

Critics were reluctant to commit taxpayer money to the work of imperial expansion. The *Guardian* sarcastically remarked: ‘The British taxpayer who cannot afford money to educate his own children or support his own poor relations in their old age always has a million or two ready to spend on schemes of this kind.’⁵² Rhodes was derided as a ‘megalomaniac’, and as a ‘sentimentalist’, even if the railway could be constructed without burdening the tax payer,

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 4 March 1899, p.15; also *Morning Post*, 2 March 1899, p.6.

⁵¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 January 1899, p.4.

⁵² *Ibid*: p.4.

opponents warned that it would be of negligible economic value, and might even place existing British interests in Africa at risk.

A case in point was the Uganda railway, financed by the Imperial Government and at that time under construction between Mombassa on the Kenyan coast and Kisumu on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. There were fears that if the Cape to Cairo line was extended to Tabora in German East Africa, the Germans would construct their own line from Tabora to their port at Dar es Salaam, thereby halving the traffic that would have travelled on the Uganda railway. For this reason critics favoured short stretches of economically viable railway which would link centres of production in the interior with ports on the coast.⁵³

There were concerns, too, as to the utility of the Cape to Cairo line itself. Passengers travelling to South Africa from Western Europe would elect to travel by sea in comfort rather than travel through the deserts of Central Africa. Nor was it likely that goods would be conveyed from one end of the line to the other. Rail travel in Africa was expensive and lacked the dependability of the steamers. Similarly, from a military or strategic perspective, critics reasoned that it would be as convenient to move an army by sea as by land.⁵⁴ The response of the *Zambesi Mission Record* – the official journal of the Rhodesian Jesuits – was indicative of both the admiration the scheme engendered among Rhodes's traditional allies, and their inability to determine its precise purpose:

The Cape to Cairo scheme is a very captivating one; it extorts admiration by its audacity and its gigantic proportions. It is a great political realization; though at first, I must own, its commercial advantages along a great portion of its route seem to me to be dubious, or rather empirical...⁵⁵

In Parliament, Sir William Harcourt implored members to reject Rhodes's 'wild cat scheme', the intention of which – by Rhodes's own

⁵³ *Morning Post*, 30 January 1899, p.4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Zambesi Mission Record*, July 1899, pp.163-166.

admission – was to bring the entire African continent under British domination. The cost incurred, both financially and diplomatically, Harcourt warned, would be borne not by the Chartered Company but by the Imperial Government. Echoing the concerns of the Radical press, Labouchere argued that it would be fool-hardy to construct a railway through a country where no Europeans lived and which would, in all likelihood, prove unsuitable for white colonisation. ‘If it pays’, Labouchere concluded, ‘the benefit is to go to the Chartered Company; and, if it does not pay, the loss is to be ours.’⁵⁶

In the event the warnings of critics were heeded and the cabinet rejected Rhodes’s proposals. In a memorandum of 18 April 1899 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, explained that concerns regarding the duration and security of the loan, the financial viability of the Chartered Company, the belief that the Government’s share of the profits had been exaggerated, and the belief that a natural outlet for a railway from Lake Tanganyika was south-eastwards to the sea and not to the Cape had combined to persuade the Government of the schemes impracticality.⁵⁷

The Government’s counterproposal of a direct loan to the Bechuanaland Railway Company was rejected by Rhodes, however, where he had failed with the Imperial Government he would succeed with the investing public. At a meeting of Chartered Company shareholders on 2 May 1899, Rhodes announced a new financing package which would see the Company supported by a combination of South African financial houses and Rhodesian development companies. ‘The confidence shown in him by the City’, noted the *Saturday Review*, ‘is a remarkable testimony to the public appreciation of his work.’⁵⁸

Despite its rejection by the Imperial Government, the Cape to Cairo scheme succeeded in capturing the imagination of the British

⁵⁶ HC Deb 6 May 1898, Vol. 57, cc538-652.

⁵⁷ Lockhart and Woodhouse, pp.401-402.

⁵⁸ *Saturday Review*, 29 April 1899, pp.513-516.

public. Rhodes had invoked a vision of a great imperial undertaking with both economic and humanitarian applications. His successful negotiations with the Kaiser had also succeeded in restoring his reputation for diplomacy. According to Stead, the reception accorded Rhodes in Berlin had 'sufficed to convince every one that, after Lord Salisbury, Mr Rhodes bulks greatest in the Empire...His sun, so far from having gone out in thick darkness, climbs ever higher towards the zenith'.⁵⁹

V

In 1892 the University of Oxford bestowed upon Rhodes an honorary Doctorate in Civil Law. As controller of the world's diamonds, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony and founder of Britain's newest imperial possession, Rhodes's star was at its zenith. Though unable to present on account of his preoccupations in South Africa, custom dictated that Rhodes would be entitled to take the degree at a time of his convenience. Finally, in 1899 Rhodes informed the Vice-Chancellor of his intention to present, a decision which – according to *The Times* - caused 'heart-burnings' throughout the University establishment.⁶⁰ As the *Manchester Guardian* observed: 'It would certainly tax the ingenuity of the Public Orator to translate the verdict of the South Africa Committee into a suitable testimonial for the Doctorate of Civil Law.'⁶¹

The University's Hebdomadal Council had been powerless to refuse Rhodes's request, however, it soon emerged that a protest had been drawn up by the Master of Balliol College, Edward Caird, which had subsequently gained the signatures of approximately ninety graduates from across the University. As the signatories prepared to lay their memorial before the Vice-Chancellor, it

⁵⁹ *Review of Reviews*, April 1899, pp.311-312.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 22 June 1899, p.12.

⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 June 1899, p.6.

appeared that recollections of the Jameson Raid would surface to condemn Rhodes once more.

The memorial found significant support in the Radical Press, for whom the awarding of an honorary degree was to be placed alongside Chamberlain's infamous endorsement of Rhodes as final proof of the injustice of the English legal system.⁶² There were, however, more pragmatic reasons for opposing the award. Relations between Britain and the Transvaal remained delicately poised over the issue of the Uitlander franchise, while allegations of Colonial Office complicity in light of Chamberlain's defence of Rhodes had failed to dissipate. The prospect of one of the nation's most venerable institutions appearing to publicly recognize Rhodes in this manner was considered by many to be dangerously impolitic. As the *Manchester Guardian* warned:

It is all very well to forgive and forget as long as our own injuries alone are concerned. But when we so readily forgive injuries done to other people we must not be surprised if those people are somewhat inclined to ascribe it not so much to our merciful disposition as to our secret sympathy with the offender.⁶³

Not for the first time, Rhodes's critics made a surprising tactical error. Significantly, the protestors did not question the Hebdomadal Council's decision not to withdraw the offer of the degree, requesting instead that they be permitted to express their disapproval with the publication of their memorial in the *University Gazette*. Having effectively conceded the futility of their protest, the memorialists unwittingly exposed themselves to accusations of unnecessary rudeness and inhospitality. The protestors were dealt a further setback when the Vice-Chancellor, wishing to maintain the neutrality of the *Gazette*, refused to authorise the publication of their memorial. He was soon supported in this stance by David Binning Monro, Provost of Oriel College (Rhodes's own alma mater) who, in a letter

⁶² *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 18 June 1899, p.1.

⁶³ *Manchester Guardian*, 19 June 1899, p.6.

to *The Times*, denounced the memorial as a 'political manifesto' and insisted that the *University Gazette* was no place for the opinions and 'regrets' of members.⁶⁴

During his interview with the Kaiser in Berlin, Rhodes had explained the effect of the former's infamous telegram in uniting the British people behind him, explaining in effect that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. This same proverb now governed the response of Oxford undergraduates to the Master of Balliol's memorial. The *Pall Mall Gazette* which had condemned the protest as 'futile', 'misguided', 'belated', and 'unseemly', had presciently observed that the sympathy of the majority remained with Rhodes, and that the protest of the dons was likely to have a very different effect to that intended:

His work for the Empire both before the Raid and after it can never be forgotten, in spite of that one colossal blunder. And the result of the protest may be such a pro-Rhodes demonstration by Young Oxford as will not be counterbalanced by the absence of the Master of Balliol.⁶⁵

Beyond a natural desire to defend Rhodes against their own would-be tormentors, it would appear that in their endorsement of his invitation, the undergraduates were also making a principled stand in defence of what they considered to be the University's proud tradition of extending gracious hospitality to friend and foe alike. In disclosing his opinions to *The Times* one undergraduate confessed:

The Master of Balliol may draw up a protest and Masters of Arts may sign it; but the whole corporate feeling of the University is against them in so doing, and this primarily for the reason that their action violates all hitherto accepted principles of hospitality and courtesy, whether to political friends or to political opponents.⁶⁶

It is tempting, therefore, to attribute the virtually unanimous support Rhodes received from the Oxford undergraduates more to a

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 21 June 1899, p.12.

⁶⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 June 1899, p.2.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 21 June 1899, p.12.

defence of their University's reputation, than from any great ardour for Rhodes or his policies. The reception which ultimately greeted Rhodes at the Encaenia, however, would appear to tell a different story, and suggests that in spite of his 'one colossal blunder' Rhodes still possessed the power to engender tremendous enthusiasm for his work, notwithstanding the usual chaffing from undergraduates customary on such occasions.

Of the ceremony itself, held on 21 June 1899, *The Times* correspondent in attendance declared: 'For many a long year there has been no commemoration at Oxford so brilliant as that which reached its academic climax in the Sheldonian Theatre yesterday.' The occasion - which was lent added lustre by the presence of the Duke and Duchess of York - assumed a distinctly Imperial character. Rhodes's fellow recipients included Lord Kitchener - fresh from his conquest of the Sudan - and Lord Elgin, the former Viceroy of India. Adding to the Imperial theme, Dr Varley Roberts, organist of Magdalen College, entertained the assembly prior to the commencement with popular patriotic airs, including the contemporary favourite, 'Soldiers of the Queen' - the chorus being taken up heartily by the undergraduates. Above the Vice-Chancellor's chair hung a banner bearing the Union Jack and the University arms, it bore an inscription translated from Latin which read: 'We undergraduates salute the defenders of our country.'

In conferring the doctorate, Dr Shadwell, Fellow of Oriel College, paid customary tribute to Rhodes in Latin, acclaiming him as a man who had given his life to the extension of the British Empire. In spite of setbacks, Shadwell anticipated that Rhodes would continue his great work, and in so doing 'unite distant lands by railway and telegraph, give trade a road from the Cape to Alexandria, preserve the *Pax Britannica*, and become a third Africanus, ranked with the Scipios, *duo fulmina belli*'.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1899, p.7.

It was an inspiring oration, which succeeded admirably in capturing the high ideals of the Imperial civilising mission in Africa – the creation of a new Rome, whose achievements would dwarf those of the ancients. Commenting on Dr Shadwell’s speech the following day, *The Times* observed: ‘It is remarkable how apt is the old Roman tongue for recording the achievements of these makers of a new Empire greater than the Empire of the Caesars.’⁶⁸

While *The Times* noted the absence of any discernible protest, the *Manchester Guardian* detected at the first mention of Rhodes’s name ‘a manifest difference of opinion’ among the crowd, though admitted that this was quickly drowned by loud applause and expressions of enthusiasm which lasted several minutes.⁶⁹ Both Rhodes and Kitchener were the subject of impromptu renditions of ‘For he’s a jolly good fellow’, the latter being greeted with cries of Caesar’s famous refrain, *Veni Vidi Vici*. A few particularly zealous undergraduates were reported to have thrown their gowns in Rhodes’s path in the expectation that ‘the Colossus’ would walk over them. Commenting upon his Oxford experience a month later, Rhodes joked with a Cape Town audience ‘that his troubles won him a better reception than if he had had none’.⁷⁰

In the days that followed the ceremony it was universally acknowledged that the protest of the dons had failed. In recounting Rhodes’s latest public relations coup the *Saturday Review* commented:

Anyone who is pursued by “the vestment of velvet and virtue” and its bulldogs immediately becomes an object of adoration to the undergraduate, and it is no wonder that the Sheldonian Theatre rose at Mr Rhodes even more heartily than at Lord Kitchener.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 22 June 1899, p.11.

⁶⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1899, p.7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 19 July 1899, p7.

⁷¹ *Saturday Review*, 24 June 1899, pp.769-772.

For Rhodes and his supporters it had been a gratifying experience. Oxford, *The Times* declared, had shown herself proud of her errant son, 'as for all his errors, his country is proud of him'.⁷²

VI

Among the most damaging accusations to be levelled against Rhodes pertain to his alleged role in the instigation of the South African War. Rhodes's recent biographer Antony Thomas described the conflict as being 'in many ways, Rhodes's war',⁷³ and it has been customary for historians to identify the Jameson Raid as its precursor.⁷⁴

In this section I will consider the ideological genesis of this belief by exploring contemporary attitudes to Rhodes's responsibility for the escalation of the crisis. It is hoped that by tracing the origins of this theory that it may be possible to identify the factors which proved influential in its conception and ultimately to assess its accuracy.

Despite the resurgence of Rhodes's reputation in the years since the Raid, his name remained indelibly linked with the abortive attempt to overthrow the Transvaal Government in December 1895. It was unsurprising, therefore, that as the Imperial Government began to ratchet up the pressure on President Kruger during the summer and autumn of 1899, that contemporaries would view these developments through the prism of the Jameson Raid.

The Transvaal's rapid mobilization in the years since the Raid had alarmed the Imperial Government, and was a significant factor in its decision to bring matters to a head. Rhodes's critics in Britain were quick to recognise the significance of these developments and to

⁷² *The Times*, 22 June 1899, p.11.

⁷³ Thomas, p.337.

⁷⁴ See for example Van der Poel, *The Jameson Raid*, Oxford 1951; Longford, *Jameson's Raid*, London 1960; Pakenham, Thomas, *The Boer War*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1980.

identify the man they considered primarily responsible. 'The Transvaal is armed to the teeth now', the *Manchester Guardian* admitted, 'but it was armed by Mr Rhodes, for it was Mr Rhodes whose attack upon it set it scouring Europe for guns, ammunition, professional military skill, every means of protection against a second attack.' The journal proffered the following statistics to demonstrate the veracity of its charges:

Year (£) Expended on Armaments

1893 19,000

1894 28,000

1895 87,000

1896 495,000⁷⁵

In the final months of peace the Jameson Raid cast a long shadow over the negotiations. Reporting from Cape Town in the days immediately prior to the onset of hostilities, a correspondent for *The Times* admitted: 'The mischief done by that act of folly is almost incalculable.' Even the primarily loyal Dutchmen of the Cape, the journal insisted, had been blinded by the intense feelings of racial sympathy generated by the Raid.⁷⁶

Antipathy to the Raid was only matched by recollections of the abortive London inquiry and Chamberlain's 'white-washing' of Rhodes. It created the impression in Dutch minds that the Colonial Office was sympathetic to - if not actively complicit in - Rhodes's conspiracy. A contributor to the *New Century* explained the Government's predicament:

If an honest man had negotiated with Kruger and given him honourable assurance that Great Britain was not using the Uitlanders' grievances as a means to grab the Transvaal...everything would have settled in a peaceful manner...But the Dutchman saw the face of Cecil Rhodes peeping over Mr Chamberlain's shoulder, and he drew back

⁷⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1900, p.6.

⁷⁶ *The Times*, 9 October 1899, p.11.

alarmed, his memory keen with the manner in which the Jameson marauders escaped with a nominal punishment, and it is due to this, and this alone, that the Boers have been stupidly obdurate.⁷⁷

The conviction that the war had been triggered by the Government's failure to punish Rhodes was pervasive. W.T. Stead – who became an outspoken critic of the war – also traced Kruger's mobilization and distrust to the Government's failure to punish Rhodes, and argued that this response had been exploited by Milner 'for the purpose of precipitating us into war'.⁷⁸

The same opinion, with minor variations, was articulated by a host of contemporary commentators. The journalist Albert Cartwright maintained that if the Imperial Government had acted in good faith the Transvaal could have been coaxed out of its isolationism;⁷⁹ the author Francis Reginald Statham insisted that the Kruger administration would ultimately have yielded to internal pressure for reform,⁸⁰ and in a piece entitled 'The Tragedy of Errors', the writer and philosopher Auberon Herbert identified the failure to adequately punish Rhodes as one of the causal factors of the South African War.⁸¹

It was widely rumoured that the Rhodes-Chamberlain compact had survived the inquiry and developed into a relationship of mutual political and economic interest. Its principal features were that the Imperial Government would support Rhodes and the Rand capitalists in overthrowing the Kruger administration as a prerequisite to the attainment of South African federation; the accomplishment of which would in-turn act as a pre-cursor to the federation of the wider Empire. Rhodes and his fellow capitalists would benefit financially by transplanting the oppressive business practices of Kimberley and

⁷⁷ *New Century Review*, November 1899, pp.410-415 (p.415).

⁷⁸ *Review of Reviews*, November 1899, pp.451-462; also July 1901, p.6; August 1901, pp.129-133; September 1901, p.241.

⁷⁹ *Speaker*, 16 December 1899, pp.282-284.

⁸⁰ *Fortnightly Review*, March 1898, pp.468-478.

⁸¹ *Contemporary Review*, February 1900, pp.194-220.

Rhodesia to Johannesburg. Meanwhile, the focus on war and imperial expansion would divert attention from progressive social causes in Britain.

Radicals had long associated imperial expansion abroad with a dereliction of social responsibilities at home, and it was not uncommon for Radical politicians to foster this connection in the public mind. Speaking at Arbroath in the weeks prior to the war, John Morley remarked:

...when you hear the sound of approaching war in your ears, it is idle to talk about ground values or old-age pensions, or any of these things; and without being uncharitable, I wonder whether some of those who send this hurricane of rumours of war into the air, whether they are quite alive to the fact...⁸²

The same attitude found expression in the British press. The *Westminster Review* claimed that while the principal objective of the South African War was more 'land-grabbing abroad', and the "collaring" of the gold-bearing lands of the Transvaal', an additional - though no less significant - objective of this second 'Rhodes-cum-Chamberlain Raid', was said to be the postponement 'for an indefinite period of land reform at home'.⁸³ A month earlier the same journal had made the alleged connection between the capitalist interest in South Africa and the Imperial Government explicit:

Cannot the people of this country see that the present robbery and buccaneering abroad are of a piece with the robbery and buccaneering at home; that it is in the nature of things that our "Landlord Government" should aid the buccaneers, the land-grabbers of the Rand, in their fell designs?⁸⁴

Radical opposition to the war was often strongly anti-capitalist in nature, a position routinely concealed or ennobled by rhetorical pronouncements concerning the Transvaal's rights as an autonomous state. While *Reynolds's Newspaper* implored its readers to consider the franchise issue from the Boer perspective, the journal

⁸² *The Times*, 6 September 1899, p.8.

⁸³ *Westminster Review*, March 1900, pp.248-256 (p.249).

⁸⁴ *Ibid*: February 1900, pp.117-134 (p.127).

frankly admitted that it had no affection for the Transvaal's institutions, any more than it had affection for 'the British House of Lords or the Established Church'. It was monopolistic capitalism with its dehumanising effects, and the supposition that imperialism and democracy were antithetical concepts that frequently loomed largest in the Radical mind. 'Working men, do not be deceived by this vile capitalist plot', *Reynolds's* concluded, 'but speak out your mind, or some day the same infamous capitalist power which is destroying liberty in South Africa will destroy your liberty too.'⁸⁵

The alleged connection between the Chartered Company and the 'landlord' class in Britain was the subject of a full-scale investigation by *Reynolds's Newspaper* which, by delving into the identities of the Company's shareholders, hoped to demonstrate a positive correlation of class interests. The journal published a sample of the Company's shareholders which indicated that since 1892 a powerful combination of 'Legislative, Military, and Society shareholders' had held over 250,000 £1 shares, which were thought to be saleable at £2,000,000 at top prices. This investment, *Reynolds's* pointed out, only represented 'society's' investment in the Chartered Company, and not the extent of their holdings in the more than seventy auxiliary companies of which the B.S.A. Company was parent. 'Need anything more be said', the journal concluded, 'to prove the justice of our repeated assertion that this is a capitalist-cum-Jewish war, a war of theft pure and simple.'⁸⁶

The argument that Rhodes had somehow engineered the war for his own financial gain manifested itself in a number of competing hypotheses. A popular explanation - and the one favoured by the economist J.A. Hobson - was that the Chartered Company's insolvency had prompted Rhodes to instigate the overthrow of the Transvaal Government in-order to restore the confidence of the

⁸⁵ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 18 June 1899, p.4.

⁸⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 March 1900, p.1.

investing public.⁸⁷ Another theory held that the Kimberley mines were on the brink of exhaustion, compelling Rhodes to establish his business interests in the Transvaal on a sounder footing by overthrowing its reactionary Government.⁸⁸

Perhaps the most popular interpretation was that Rhodes and his fellow capitalists wished to introduce the same business practices to Johannesburg which had proven so controversial in Rhodesia and Kimberley. The ramifications of this were particularly disquieting for British labour leaders. Firstly, it meant the replacement of white labour for black, secondly, it threatened to drive down white wages or put whites out of business altogether. Not only were white consumers necessarily reduced by the lack of employment opportunities, the Africans themselves were confined to the compounds for the length of their contracts, meaning that those businesses in Kimberley not directly affiliated with De Beers had suffered greatly in lost trade. Finally, there was the notion that wherever Rhodes's Company's held sway despotic administrations had been established. *Reynolds's Newspaper* maintained that while the franchise at Kimberley was theoretically wide, in reality the working man was as powerless as 'dumb driven cattle', his ballot being cast at the command of his 'monopolist employers'.⁸⁹

In a pamphlet published by the *Morning Leader* in 1901, labour leaders argued that for working men of either colour the Kruger administration ensured the provision of higher wages and more favourable working conditions. Since the occupation of the Transvaal African labour in the mines had allegedly fallen from 10s per week to 7s 6d per week. In their public pronouncements Chartered Company officials did little to allay such fears. On 14 November 1899 the Company's engineer, John Hays Hammond - taking into account the reduction in wages - 'estimated that the savings upon the last year's

⁸⁷ Ibid: 8 July 1900, p.5.

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 7 November 1899, p.5.

⁸⁹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 23 July 1899, p.4.

tonnage of ore crushed would give an additional profit of £2,199,000, which, he explained, would represent an increase in dividends of forty five per cent'. Moreover, there was the recollection that Transvaal Law had protected workers from longer working hours and the seven day week.⁹⁰

The accusations against Rhodes and the wider economic critique of imperialism were lent intellectual validity by the work of economist J.A. Hobson. In addition to the highly influential books Hobson published during the war, he was a regular correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Nation*, and the *Speaker*.

These articles would form the basis of Hobson's treatise on the origins of the South African War⁹¹ and his 1902 work, *Imperialism*.⁹² Hobson's theory of imperialism was an extension of his earlier premise that underconsumption was the basis of unemployment and social hardship.⁹³ Hobson argued that the mal-distribution of capital in industrially developed nations had produced an economic climate in which consumption failed to keep pace with the powers of production. Applying this theory to the study of imperialism Hobson argued that surplus capital - unable to find occupation at home - was required to find foreign markets for goods and investments.

The aspect of Hobson's theory which interests us here was his belief that in the pursuit of tropical or sub-tropical colonies, broader national interests had been subordinated to those of the capitalist class. Hobson refuted the maxim that 'Trade follows the flag', noting that Britain's import and export trade with her newly acquired colonies was of little commercial value. He rejected the notion that a surplus population in Britain required new homes, and argued that

⁹⁰ *Labour Leaders and the War*, published by the *Morning Leader*, 1901.

⁹¹ Hobson, J.A., *The War in South Africa*, James Nisbet and Co. Ltd, London, 1900.

⁹² *Ibid: Imperialism: A Study*, James Nisbet and Co. Ltd, London, 1902.

⁹³ Fieldhouse, D.K. *The Theory of Capitalist Imperialism*, Longmans, London 1967, p54; also Hobson, J.A., *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism*, Walter Scott, London 1894.

even if this were true, the conquest of inhospitable lands in Africa and elsewhere would not satisfy this need.

Hobson argued that imperialists such as Rhodes were 'essentially parasites upon Patriotism', men willing to 'adapt themselves to its protecting colours'. While acknowledging that many principled individuals no doubt believed their own rhetoric that imperialism would extirpate the slave trade, extend the benefits of Christianity, and improve the lives of subject races, Hobson maintained that they were conscious, too, of less altruistic incentives.⁹⁴ Hobson further propagated the belief that Rhodes had adopted imperialism 'as a last resort', referencing Rhodes's apparent opposition to the 'imperial factor' in Bechuanaland, and his donation to the Irish Nationalists earlier in his career as evidence of this alleged about-face.⁹⁵

Applying his theory of imperialism to the issue of the South African War and its origins, Hobson popularised the notion that Rhodes and his fellow capitalists had instigated the conflict to subserve their business interests. Hobson reminded his readers that as Premier of the Cape Rhodes had fought bills to tax diamonds, defeated opposition to the compound system at Kimberley, dictated labour laws, and secured funding for railway construction beneficial to his various interests. By once again marrying business and political interests Rhodes would attempt to affect the same result in the Transvaal.⁹⁶

After the failure of the Jameson Raid Rhodes had declared that in future he would seek reform by 'constitutional means'. Hobson insisted that this meant using 'the armed forces of the British Crown and the money of the British taxpayer...[to secure his] economical

⁹⁴ *Speaker*, 30 November 1901, pp.245-246.

⁹⁵ *Contemporary Review*, January 1900, pp.1-17.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

and political ambitions'. This he had allegedly achieved by the manipulation of the press.⁹⁷

In a series of articles entitled 'A Chartered Press' - which ultimately inspired a chapter of the same name in his book on the origins of the war - Hobson charged Rhodes and his fellow capitalists with having manipulated the South African press to secure support for a war policy against the Transvaal. 'The chief object of the press conspiracy', Hobson argued, 'was the conquest of the Government and the conscience of Great Britain.' Aware that British journals relied heavily upon their South African counterparts for news, Rhodes had allegedly sought control of the latter that he might influence the former.⁹⁸

Many years earlier Rhodes had purchased the *Cape Argus*, an evening journal, with the support of his fellow Randlords Eckstein and Barnato. According to Hobson the *Cape Argus* Company had subsequently expanded its portfolio to include the *Johannesburg Star*, the *Bulawayo Chronicle*, the *Rhodesia Herald*, and the *African Review*. The *Cape Times* - the most influential paper in South Africa - had allegedly come under the control of the same body of capitalists, half its shares having been bought up by Rhodes's secretary Dr Rutherford Harris, while the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* of Kimberley had passed into the hands of Harris's brother-in-law. Hobson argued that at the Cape this 'kept press' had propagated rumours of Bond disloyalty and of a Dutch conspiracy to cast off British power, while in the Transvaal the capitalist-owned press had advocated a policy of internal rebellion or external coercion to secure the rights of Uitlanders.⁹⁹

Hobson's claim of a 'Chartered Press' struck a chord with British Radicals who complained of a similar erosion of influence in their

⁹⁷ Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, pp.206-207.

⁹⁸ Ibid: pp.206-228.

⁹⁹ Ibid; also *Speaker*: 9 December 1899, pp.254-255; 16 December 1899, pp.280-281; also 'A Chartered Press', letter by William Roper, 13 January 1900, pp.402-403.

own country. The *Daily News*, considered the single 'quality' Liberal morning paper, had adopted an imperialist stance since E.T. Cook's appointment as editor in 1895. Hobson would later refer to this loss as the 'heaviest blow upon the cause of truth and honesty in England'.¹⁰⁰ *Reynolds's Newspaper* had subsequently confirmed that Edmund Garrett - editor of the *Cape Times* and a Rhodes loyalist - was acting as the South Africa correspondent of the *Daily News*, a newspaper part-owned by Rhodes's secretary, Dr Rutherford Harris.¹⁰¹ Hobson's theory was lent further credence when the dwindling number of 'pro-Boer' dailies was reduced still further when H.W. Massingham - a notable opponent of the war - was compelled to resign as editor of the *Daily Chronicle* in 1899.¹⁰² Commenting on the enforced changes at the *Chronicle*, Labouchere complained:

The idea that the editor of an Opposition newspaper should pledge his word not to criticize the Government puts the finishing touch to the conspiracy against the liberty of the Press, which has been for some time on foot.¹⁰³

The reliance of British journals on the South African press was reinforced by the admission of *The Times* that their correspondent in the Transvaal, William Monypenny, was also the editor of the Rhodes affiliated Johannesburg *Star*.¹⁰⁴

The Times underestimated Hobson, believing that he had unwittingly conceded too many points to the imperialists. '...the admissions which a spirit of justice forces him to make', the journal concluded, 'are in many instances more than enough to dispose of his whole case'.¹⁰⁵ More perceptive commentators, however, recognised that Hobson's moderation was in fact his greatest strength. He had not sought to idealise the Boers, he did not deny the failings of the Kruger administration, nor did he portray Rhodes

¹⁰⁰ Hobson, *The South African War*, pp.216-217.

¹⁰¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*: 30 July 1899, p.1; 6 August 1899, p.1; 27 August 1899, p.5.

¹⁰² Koss, p.385; also *Reynolds's Newspaper*: 3 December 1899, p.1 and p.8.

¹⁰³ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 3 December 1899, p.8.

¹⁰⁴ *The Times*, 7 August 1899, p.6.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 8 March 1900, p.14.

as a supernatural terror. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* observed: 'Such a comparatively moderate pro-Boer as Mr Hobson – one, that is, who frankly makes so many admissions – is far more dangerous than the totally blind extremist, who immediately defeats his own end.'¹⁰⁶ The journal was correct in its assessment that Hobson's work represented 'perhaps the ablest argument of the pro-Boer case'.¹⁰⁷

Hobson's theory of imperialism and his economic explanations for the war have been disputed throughout the 20th Century.¹⁰⁸ Space does not permit a comprehensive review of such criticisms. In summary, it has been argued that Capitalist groups do not direct national policy, they adapt to it. Schumpeter would later liken Hobson's theory to other popular superstitions such as the global Jewish conspiracy.¹⁰⁹ Of particular relevance to our case is A.J.P. Taylor's argument that Hobson's fundamental misconception was that he believed Rhodes to be motivated by pecuniary interest. On the contrary, Taylor explained, Rhodes wanted wealth for the power that it brought, not for its own sake. Hence Rhodes understood the realities of politics better than his critics.¹¹⁰

Hobson proved remarkably influential, and despite his detractors, the residual influence of his theories concerning imperialism, the South African War and Rhodes himself continue to this day. From a contemporary perspective this influence would not be truly felt until after Rhodes's death, and in the meantime Hobson's economic interpretation of the war would be challenged by his peers.

The notion of a 'Chartered Press', which underpinned Hobson's theory as to the causes of the war, was widely discredited by the

¹⁰⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 February 1900, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ See for example: Nemmers, E.E., *Hobson and Underconsumption*, North Holland Publishing House, Amsterdam, 1956; Schumpeter, J.A., *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Allen and Unwin, 1950; Taylor, A.J.P. *Englishmen and Others*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1956.

¹⁰⁹ Schumpeter, J.A., *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), 3rd edn. Allen and Unwin, 1950, p.55, fn.7.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, A.J.P., pp.76-80.

alleged conspirators themselves. In a letter to *The Times* William Money Penny - the latter's correspondent in the Transvaal and editor of the *Johannesburg Star* – insisted that Rhodes had played no part in his appointment, and that he had not communicated with the latter since his arrival in Johannesburg. 'Neither he nor anyone else', Money Penny insisted, 'is in a position to dictate my policy as editor of the *Star*.'¹¹¹ A similar denial was issued by the proprietor of the *Cape Times*, F.Y. St. Leger, who had entered into partnership with Dr Rutherford Harris, secretary of the Chartered Company. Leger admitted that editorial duties had been transferred to the Rhodes loyalist Edmund Garrett, however, he insisted that he had retained the political direction of the journal in his own hands.¹¹²

Critics of the 'Chartered Press' theory offered a more prosaic explanation for the dominance of imperialist sentiment – namely its popularity. The British press, *The Times* insisted, 'like any other, depends on its readers and reflects their views'.¹¹³ As press historian Stephen Koss observed: 'Beyond any doubt opposition to the war did not pay', indeed, 'Liberal support for the war scarcely paid better.'¹¹⁴ The contemporary writer Elie Halévy concurred, if imperialism was to be the order of the day, the imperialism of Salisbury and Chamberlain was preferable:

It was perfectly frank, and was not compromised by an alliance either with the supporters of peace at any price or, and this was the decisive factor, with the partisans of Irish Home Rule, the would be disrupters of the United Kingdom.¹¹⁵

One of the principal organizations in South Africa dedicated to the maintenance of British supremacy and to the promotion of good government within, and amicable relations between the South African states was the South African League, of which Rhodes had recently assumed the Presidency. To its detractors the League was

¹¹¹ *The Times*, 7 August 1899, p.6.

¹¹² *Ibid*: 30 March 1901, p.12.

¹¹³ *Ibid*: 3 April 1900, p.7.

¹¹⁴ Koss, p.397.

¹¹⁵ Halévy, p.8.

considered an essential cog in the wheel of pro-war propaganda, and had been charged with 'poisoning the wells of public knowledge'. Speaking in defence of the League, and by extension against the existence of a malevolent Rhodesian conspiracy, Chamberlain told Parliament that the League, far from being an instrument of the capitalist, was in fact a popular organization which received very little financial assistance, the largest subscription not exceeding £50. 'From what I have heard', Chamberlain continued, 'it is one of the poorest and, at the same time most representative political organisations which has ever been established.'¹¹⁶ Hobson himself never denied the humble origins of this organization, however, he insisted that its influence had been nil until the capitalists took up its interests.¹¹⁷

Speaking on behalf of its sister organization in Britain - the Imperial South African Association - Lord Windsor denied that his organization had ever received political instructions from Rhodes and resented the implication that the Association was actuated by 'some narrower motive'. Its objective, Windsor insisted, was patriotic, and dedicated to the maintenance of imperial supremacy.¹¹⁸

There were also numerous witnesses willing to attest to the fact that the Uitlander protests which had precipitated the war were political, rather than economic, in nature. The journalist Arnold White – himself no admirer of Rhodes – admitted that the later movement was of a different character to that which had existed before the Raid. White characterised the latest petition to the Queen as 'original in every sense', a spontaneous appeal from middle and working class Uitlanders with families to support and children to educate. 'The petition', he insisted, '[had] not been instigated by the millionaires of Park Lane or Johannesburg.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ HC Deb 19 October 1899, Vol. 77, cc254-371; also *The Times*, 20 October 1899, p.5.

¹¹⁷ Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, p.202.

¹¹⁸ *The Times*, 16 December 1899, p12.

¹¹⁹ *National Review*, May 1899, pp.380-388 (pp.380-381).

An Uitlander contributing to the *Fortnightly Review* frankly admitted: 'The capitalists held apart, the petitioners were spontaneous. It was a petition by the *people* of Johannesburg.'¹²⁰ Rhodes himself had argued: 'It is not Rhodes that is causing unrest in South Africa. It is the Transvaal position that is causing unrest in South Africa. And if I were dead tomorrow the same thing would go on.'¹²¹

Rhodes's influence in South Africa had waned since the Jameson Raid and contemporaries knew it. The reform movement at Johannesburg had new leaders, as William Monypenny, *The Times* correspondent at Johannesburg attested:

...If the movement had been inspired by Mr Rhodes, it could never have succeeded in winning the almost unanimous sympathy and support which it commands here to-day. In no city probably of the British Empire, or within the British sphere of influence, is Mr Rhodes's name less a name to conjure with than in Johannesburg...his influence here is practically non-existent. Milner, not Rhodes is the name which arouses enthusiasm in Johannesburg today.¹²²

Increasingly it was Sir Alfred Milner and Joseph Chamberlain who were linked to the escalation of the crisis in South Africa. For Milner, the *Daily News* explained, 'Time and Patience' with Kruger's administration had become a 'euphemism for "Drift"'. Perceiving that Britain's position in South Africa was growing progressively weaker Milner, with Chamberlain's acquiescence, had sought to bring matters to a head. The journal concluded that Milner 'not, for once, Mr Rhodes, who is completely "off" in this scene – is the real personal pivot of the present South African situation'.¹²³

The *Speaker* argued that the capitalists, who stood to lose more from the war than anyone, had believed that if Kruger was 'judiciously' handled war, and the associated disruption to their

¹²⁰ *Fortnightly Review*, June 1899, pp.1038-1047 (p.1039).

¹²¹ Millin, Sarah Gertrude, *Cecil Rhodes*, Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York and London 1933, pp.372-373.

¹²² *The Times*, 7 August 1899, p.6.

¹²³ *Daily News*, 30 May 1899, p.7.

commercial activities, could be averted. This failure was attributed to the politicians, and above all to Milner and Chamberlain, rather than to the policy of Rhodes and the Rand capitalists.¹²⁴

W.T. Stead - who characteristically held Chamberlain responsible for the escalation of the crisis - insisted that Rhodes was no war monger, and that the latter's public pronouncements concerning the inevitability of peaceful reform was a reflection of the beliefs Rhodes held both publicly and privately. As for Rhodes's alleged role in provoking the conflict, Stead, in line with Rhodes's most even-handed biographers, insisted that responsibility for the war lay elsewhere; indeed, for Stead it was Rhodes's lack of participation in the negotiations that was a cause of lasting regret:

Mr Rhodes occupies no official position in South Africa. He is no soldier, neither is he intrusted with any official or diplomatic functions...the ablest man in South Africa was an outsider whose advice was not sought, much less taken, by Sir Alfred Milner, while the real negotiator was not in South Africa at all, but in Downing Street.¹²⁵

VII

As war approached Rhodes travelled to Kimberley to oversee the defence of the town which had made his fortune. He arrived on 10 October 1899, a day before the expiration of President Kruger's ultimatum and the commencement of hostilities. As part of a wider invasion of British territory, Boer forces moved quickly to capture Kimberley, and the siege commenced on 14 October.

Under Rhodes's direction the De Beers workshop was converted into an armaments factory, producing artillery shells and a Howitzer, affectionately named 'Long Cecil'. With its 4.1 inch bore capable of firing shells of approximately 30lbs, the gun was able to hit Boer targets to the North and North West of the town hitherto beyond the

¹²⁴ *Speaker*, 22 July 1899, pp.62-64.

¹²⁵ *Review of Reviews*, November 1899, pp.451-462 (p.451).

range of Kimberley's existing artillery. During the testing of the gun Rhodes was personally responsible for firing several shells at the Boer positions. Headlines such as the *Morning Post*'s 'Mr Rhodes as Gunner' conveyed the sense that Rhodes was not only bearing the hardships of the siege with the residents of Kimberley, but taking an active role in the town's defence.¹²⁶ The letter of a Boer despatch rider which subsequently fell into British hands conveyed something of the panic which the firing of 'Long Cecil' had affected in the besieging Boers, adding to the propaganda value of the De Beers gun.¹²⁷

In addition to the supply of armaments Rhodes's role in provisioning the town was given full coverage by the British press. De Beers had stockpiled significant quantities of food and other necessities, and when the Boers cut the town's water supply, the Company connected its own reservoir at the Premier Mine to the town system.

Rhodes's eclectic contributions to the life of the town included the raising of a body of troops – the Kimberley Light Horse – to supplement the regular forces billeted in the town, the establishment of soup kitchens to feed the populace, the provision of uniforms to Boer prisoners, and in celebration of the Christmas season the distribution of 42 plum puddings among the camps. And when the shelling intensified Rhodes made provisions for women, children, and other non-combatants to take shelter in the mines.

The Times reported that Rhodes's contribution to the siege could scarcely be overestimated. De Beers with its 3,000 cattle and 3,000 shells had been largely responsible for both feeding and arming the town's defenders. De Beers' coal had not only supplied the town with water but powered the searchlights, De Beers' galleries had provided

¹²⁶ See for example: *Morning Post*, 25 January 1900, p.5; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 January 1900, p.2; *Standard*, 25 January 1900, pp.4-5; *The Times*, 25 January 1900, p.5.

¹²⁷ See for example: *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 January 1900, p.7; *Daily News*, 27 January 1900, p.5; *Standard*, 27 January 1900, p.5; *Daily News*, 31 January 1900, p.7; *Morning Post*, 31 January 1900, p.7.

bomb proof shelters for the citizenry – even the Company’s refuse heaps had been utilised to form the breastworks of the town.¹²⁸

The Boers’ investment of Kimberley was widely acknowledged as a prodigious error. Instead of occupying Naauwpoort, De Aaar, and the almost undefended region of the Orange River, Rhodes’s presence had kept several thousand Boers unoccupied at Kimberley. This in-turn had prevented the invasion of the Cape Colony, and the incitement of its Dutch population. ‘To have brought this about, by force of the personal antipathy borne to him by the enemy’, *The Times* concluded, ‘is not one of the least of the services which Mr Rhodes has rendered to his country.’¹²⁹

Following the lifting of the siege on 15 February 1900, a number of contemporary accounts served to augment Rhodes’s contribution to the town’s defence. Dr E. Oliver Ashe published an eyewitness account, *Besieged by the Boers*, in which he referenced Rhodes’s most notable contributions and concluded by attributing the town’s successful defence to its great benefactor who had ‘acted as a guardian angel to us all’.¹³⁰

Further accounts were rendered by Rhodes’s friend’s Rochfort Maguire and his wife Julia (nee Peel). While Maguire offered his impressions of the siege in an interview with the *Daily News*,¹³¹ the Hon. Mrs Rochfort Maguire published an extensive account of their experiences in *The Times*.¹³² Mrs Maguire attributed the prevention of scurvy among the white population to Rhodes, noting in particular his organisation of the Kimberley soup kitchens, which utilised vegetables procured from his model village at Kenilworth. By the end of the siege 15,000 people were being fed in this way on a daily

¹²⁸ *The Times*, 19 March 1900, p.11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*: 27 March 1902, p.7.

¹³⁰ Ashe, E.O. *Besieged by the Boers*, Hutchinson and Co. London 1900, p.210.

¹³¹ *Daily News*, 21 March 1900, p.3.

¹³² *The Times*, 19 March 1900, p.12.

basis. 'Mr Rhodes', she enthused, could be found 'heading and generally originating every movement for the help of the people'.¹³³

There were further tributes from both commercial and military sources. At the annual meeting of the Chartered Company which took place in London at the height of the siege, the Duke of Abercorn praised Rhodes's 'unflinching courage, his disinterested devotion to duty, and his unselfish patriotism'.¹³⁴ At the meeting of the Kimberley Waterworks Company in London the presiding officer declared that whatever disadvantages may have been entertained as to Rhodes's presence at Kimberley, 'in his *rôle* of a bait to the Boers, they were more than compensated for by the brilliant services rendered by him and the *employés* of the great enterprise over which he presided'.¹³⁵

In spite of Rhodes's frequent and often violent clashes with the military authorities at Kimberley, publicly at least, he received the commendation of both Lieutenant Colonel Kekewich, the commander of the town's defences, and Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in South Africa. Roberts spoke appreciatively of Rhodes's 'untiring energy and remarkable personality', while Kekewich - whatever his personal feelings - publicly endorsed Rhodes for his 'generosity' and 'zeal'.¹³⁶

The extent to which Rhodes had clashed with Kekewich only became fully apparent in the months following the siege. Two incidents in particular would serve to tarnish Rhodes's newly won reputation as the people's champion, and reinforce a number of negative character traits in the public mind.

On both occasions Rhodes defied the military censor by employing his newspaper, the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, to publicise decisions taken by the military authorities which he considered prejudicial to his business interests. The first incident

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid: 15 December 1899, p.4.

¹³⁵ Ibid: 22 May 1900, p.5.

¹³⁶ *The Times*: 5 March 1900, p.5 and 9 May 1900, p.15.

occurred when Lord Methuen – the British officer commanding the relief force – signalled his intention to evacuate non-combatants from Kimberley upon the lifting of the siege. In his desire to see the working life of the town resume as quickly as possible, Rhodes directed the *Advertiser* to publish a provocative article conjuring up images of bankruptcy and financial ruin for both the town and its citizens if Methuen's plans were realised.¹³⁷

The second incident resulted in the closure of the *Advertiser* and the issuing of an arrest warrant for the journal's editor. The article in question was entitled 'Why Kimberley Cannot wait', and represented an impassioned plea to the authorities to relieve the town at the earliest moment, ostensibly to relieve the suffering of its inhabitants, though his pleas contained more than a hint of pecuniary interest. The words belonged to Rhodes and they echoed the sentiments he had expressed in numerous messages which had been smuggled out of Kimberley since the onset of the siege.¹³⁸

The accusations that Rhodes had clashed with the military authorities of a town under siege, and that he had misled officials in South Africa by exaggerating Kimberley's plight, appear to have originated in an article by an anonymous British officer entitled 'The Responsibility of Cecil Rhodes', published in the *North American Review* barely a month after the lifting of the siege. The author insisted that Rhodes's pleas for relief had compelled General Sir Redvers Buller, then commanding the British forces in South Africa, to postpone his march on Bloemfontein, divide his troops, and send a relief column forthwith to Kimberley. Rhodes's 'baleful' influence, the author argued, in forcing Buller to divide his forces and abandon 'the only sound plan of campaign for an indefinite period', had played a

¹³⁷ Gardner, Brian, *The Lion's Cage*, Arthur Barker Ltd. London 1969, pp.111-114 and pp.135-139.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*: pp.169-170.

significant role in the series of reverses which had subsequently befallen British arms.¹³⁹

In referencing the aforementioned article the *Manchester Guardian* held Rhodes personally responsible for the heavy losses sustained by Methuen's ill-prepared relief column en-route to Kimberley, in particular the costly defeat at Magersfontein. It was further argued that the division of Buller's forces had resulted in Major-General Gatacre's defeat at Stormberg in the Northern Cape. Rhodes was thereby charged with indirect responsibility for two of the three defeats during the infamous 'Black Week' of December 1899.

The *Guardian* had argued that the richest man in Kimberley had been the first to tire of the siege. Other journals went considerably further, implying not impatience or even pecuniary interest, but cowardice. The *Speaker* attributed the glowing reports of Rhodes's contribution to the siege as yet another example of his control over the press.¹⁴⁰ What the reports 'did not say', the journal argued, was 'that the nation-builder had been whimpering and screaming all the time like a spoiled baby to be rescued, nor...that the graves at Belmont and Modder River and Magersfontein are tributes to his selfish clamour'.¹⁴¹

This opinion was captured in lyrical form in the contemporary poem, 'The Road to Kimberley' by Bertrand Shadwell. Originally published in the *Chicago Record*, the poem soon appeared in the Radical press in Britain. It told the story of Methuen's relief force as it struggled to carve a path through to Kimberley. The second stanza read:

¹³⁹ *North American Review*, March 1900, pp.348-356 (p.355).

¹⁴⁰ For Rhodes's use of 'reverse censorship' see Gardner, pp.182-183.

¹⁴¹ *Speaker*, 24 March 1900, pp.662-663.

Do you hear the rifles calling,
Cecil Rhodes?
Brave and honest men are falling,
Cecil Rhodes.
Bursting shell and shrapnel flying,
Strew the earth with dead and dying.
Do you think that you are worth it,
Cecil Rhodes, Cecil Rhodes?
Is their blood upon your conscience,
Cecil Rhodes?¹⁴²

Swift MacNeill led the political criticism in the House of Commons, asking the Under Secretary of State for War, George Wyndham, whether it was true that Methuen had been ordered to take Kimberley at all costs simply because Rhodes was there. The Secretary made no direct reply, though Rhodes's friend, the Conservative MP Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, was quick to remind MacNeill that there had been 45,000 people besieged at Kimberley not just one. The latter remained unsatisfied, however, and in recounting the lives lost informed the Under Secretary that:

The fathers, the mothers, and the sisters of the men who fell require an explanation for the blood of those dear to them, and the explanation that Rhodes had to be protected and that the interests of German Jews had to be safeguarded will not be sufficient.¹⁴³

More damaging still was the notion that Rhodes's motivation to expedite the relief of the town stemmed not from a concern for the health and security of its inhabitants but from commercial interest. In this regard Rhodes unwittingly contributed to his own injury. In the

¹⁴² *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 1 April 1900, p.4.

¹⁴³ HC Deb 28 May 1900 Vol. 83 cc1561-8; also *The Times*, 29 May 1900, p.6.

immediate aftermath of the siege, Rhodes informed a meeting of De Beers shareholders: 'We have done our duty in preserving and protecting the greatest commercial asset in the world – her Majesty's flag.'¹⁴⁴ In the hands of the Radical press this ambiguous statement caused a minor outrage. To Rhodes's critics it was tantamount to an admission that financial considerations lay at the very heart of the conflict then raging in South Africa. It also placed an unflattering construction upon Rhodes's alleged commitment to the empire, namely that his overriding concern was not for the national interest but his own. This attitude was encapsulated by the *Speaker*:

It is because our national flag is the best commercial asset in the world that Mr Rhodes bought a Press to agitate for war. It is for no other reason that he gloats over the hope of annexing the two Republics...Separatist or Imperialist, ally or foe of the Bond, threatening to "cut the painter" or to extinguish the Republics, he never lifted himself out of the miry gutter of finance.¹⁴⁵

Criticism of the remark extended far beyond the 'pro-Boer' press. Writing in the *Nineteenth Century* the journalist Sir Thomas Wemyss Reid admitted that 'A good many persons, by no means of the Little England School', had been greatly 'perturbed' by Rhodes's pronouncements. 'If the English flag were in his eyes nothing more than a commercial asset', Reid concluded, then 'substantial support would be given to the theory that the present war is being waged not for honour or freedom but for gain.'¹⁴⁶

Rhodes had struck a discordant note with the British public at a time when the Empire was reeling from a series of devastating reverses in the field. While the *Daily News* justified Rhodes's decision to defend the expenditures of the siege to De Beers' shareholders, it concluded that his callous remark had left a great deal unsaid as to the political justification for the war.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ *The Times*, 27 February 1900, p.5.

¹⁴⁵ *Speaker*, 3 March 1900, pp.580-581.

¹⁴⁶ *Nineteenth Century*, April 1900, pp.698-712.

¹⁴⁷ *Daily News*, 3 March 1900, p.4.

Even Rhodes's closest friends recognised that in associating the defence of Kimberley, however indirectly, with the protection of commercial interests, Rhodes had made a *bêtise*; as W.T. Stead admitted: 'It was an unfortunate expression in his mouth. Why should he give his enemies the joy of quoting his own words to justify their calumny that his devotion to the flag is primarily financial?'¹⁴⁸

Accusations of self-interest would continue to plague Rhodes throughout the war. There was a minor scandal in the summer of 1901 when rumours circulated that Rhodes and De Beers had filed a compensation claim totalling £800,000 against the Imperial Government in connection with the siege. When Swift MacNeill subsequently raised the issue in the Commons, Balfour, as First Lord of the Treasury, denied the rumours of a compensation claim while confirming that De Beers had filed a claim for £300,000 in relation to expenses incurred by the Company for goods supplied and services rendered.¹⁴⁹

VIII

Rhodes died of an extensive heart aneurism on 26 March 1902; he was forty eight years old. News of his death provoked an outpouring of public grief, particularly in South Africa, where public amusements ceased, businesses closed, and flags were flown at half-mast on all public buildings. News of Rhodes's death quickly spread around the world, eliciting warm tributes and expressions of sympathy throughout the British Empire. Elsewhere, reaction to his death was notably mixed. Both the diversity of opinion and the vehemence with which those opinions were held would become a defining feature of all subsequent deliberations of Rhodes's legacy.

¹⁴⁸ *Review of Reviews*, March edition 1900, p.207.

¹⁴⁹ HC Deb 6 May 1901, Vol. 93 cc731-2; also *The Times*, 7 May 1901, p.6.

There can be no definitive response as to how news of Rhodes's death was received in Britain, beyond the sense that they had witnessed the passing of a titan. As W.T. Stead testified:

When Mr Rhodes died, the most conspicuous figure left in the English-speaking race since the death of Queen Victoria disappeared...Outside England none of our politicians, statesmen, or administrators impressed the imagination of the world half as deeply as Cecil Rhodes...¹⁵⁰

Rhodes's biographers, Lockhart and Woodhouse, would later contend that 'Rhodes [had] died at a bad moment for his reputation.'¹⁵¹ The war, which many attributed to his actions, continued to rage in South Africa, there had been a resurgence of interest in the Jameson Raid following the publication of compromising documents in *l' Indépendance Belge*, and his name had been publicly linked with both the Schnadhorst donation scandal,¹⁵² and the Radziwell forgery case.¹⁵³ Many contended that he had left his work unfinished, and the land he had sought to unify more divided than ever before. In its coverage of Rhodes's funeral cortège *The Times* hinted at such a sentiment:

¹⁵⁰ *Review of Reviews*, 31 March 1902, p.331.

¹⁵¹ Lockhart and Woodhouse, p.481.

¹⁵² In 1891 Rhodes had made a donation to the Liberal Party through an intermediary by the name of Schnadhorst. Rhodes made two conditions: firstly that his contribution be secret; secondly, he requested that if a future Home Rule Bill excluded Irish members from Westminster, his cheque should be returned to him. Rhodes was principally concerned with Britain's continuing occupation of Egypt – the proposed terminus of his Cape to Cairo railway. He had been disquieted by a contemporaneous speech made by John Morley, in which the latter appeared to favour a policy of abandonment. Despite this being an overriding concern Rhodes only alluded to his position on Egypt in a postscript to the letter which accompanied his cheque. In the event, the Liberal Party retained Rhodes's donation and Egypt was not abandoned. Rhodes's donation finally came to light in 1901, and although Liberal leaders denied any cognizance of Rhodes's contribution, and any suggestion that they had acted under his direction, elements of the British press interpreted the donation as yet further evidence of Rhodes's willingness to use his personal wealth to influence imperial politics. News of the contribution also provided a novel explanation as to why the Liberal members had treated Rhodes so leniently during the enquiry into the Jameson Raid.

¹⁵³ In the months preceding his death Rhodes was once more embroiled in scandal as his admirer, the Polish aristocrat Princess Catherine Radziwill (1858-1941), stood accused of having forged his signature to sundry letters and bills for various sums of money; a few weeks after Rhodes's death she was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

One could have wished that he had been laid to rest when peace had returned to the land, and that his body had been conveyed not past blockhouses and armed men, but amid a happy and united people.¹⁵⁴

The significance of Rhodes's death to the Empire was a contentious issue. A number of contemporaries – by no means limited to his traditional opponents – were of the opinion that Rhodes's had already outlived his usefulness, and that even prior to his death, he had passed the imperial standard to a new generation. The *Saturday Review* spoke fondly of Rhodes's 'heyday', and noted that 'At the time of his death the reins had passed, as he wished them to pass, from his hands.'¹⁵⁵ The *Manchester Guardian's* assessment was that in spite of his earlier triumphs, Rhodes's reputation had been significantly tarnished by the time of his death. The journal concluded: 'Mr Rhodes before he died had outlived the warmest of the admiration that he thus won.'¹⁵⁶ Others, still regarding Rhodes as the power behind the throne, appear to have almost welcomed his death as a portent for the establishment of peace and unity in South Africa.

To his supporters Rhodes's death was a catastrophe for the Empire. During the siege of Kimberley W.T. Stead, anxious for Rhodes's safety, had confessed that 'the loss of Mr Rhodes would be felt alike by our friends and foes throughout the world as a greater blow to the Empire than any conceivable reverse that might be inflicted upon British arms'.¹⁵⁷

At length the blow had fallen and it remained unclear as to what the effects of his loss would be. Despite the assurances of its directors' that the Chartered Company would survive the death of its founder, there was considerable speculation - particularly on the continent - as to whether the Company would endure the absence of

¹⁵⁴ *The Times*, 10 April 1902, p.9.

¹⁵⁵ *Saturday Review*, 29 March 1902, pp.388-389.

¹⁵⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 March 1902, p.5.

¹⁵⁷ *Review of Reviews*, November 1899, p.451.

its guiding spirit. The French newspaper *Le Gaulois* predicted that Rhodes's loss would be akin to the disappearance of Napoleon in the middle of the Russian or French campaign: 'Generals, armies, men remain; the chief alone has gone. But who does not feel that that chief was everything?'¹⁵⁸

Debate as to the significance of Rhodes's death inevitably turned to the question of how the great empire builder would be judged by posterity. The Empire had known controversial figures before; the legacies of Clive, Hastings, and Pitt had all been contested by contemporaries. A period of censure had invariably given way to an appreciation of their services to the Empire. Rhodes would presumably follow suit, and in-order to expedite matters a number of contemporaries favoured abandoning the period of censure altogether.

Accordingly, his supporters maintained that the generations of the future would be quick to forget his indiscretions and would instead celebrate the great achievements of his life. *Blackwood's Magazine* predicted that the man who had 'lit up the Dark Continent', and whose telegraph and railway – 'civilisation's strongest chains' – would soon join Cairo to the Cape, would surely not be condemned on a 'side issue'.¹⁵⁹ This optimistic assessment was evidently predicated on the continuing existence of the British Empire, which explains to a significant extent why Rhodes's reputation today bears a closer resemblance to the assessment of his contemporary opponents than those of his supporters. The journalist E.B. Iwan-Muller argued that in a hundred or two hundred years' time – 'when South Africa is teeming with a prosperous population of English origin' – they would bless the man they now called 'thief' and 'land-grabber', for he would have for them new homes and free markets.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Views of *Le Gaulois*, quoted in *The Times*, 28 March 1902, p.3.

¹⁵⁹ *Blackwood's Magazine*, March 1902, pp.422-433 (p.428).

¹⁶⁰ *Fortnightly Review*, May 1902, pp.741-761(p.744).

The prescient observation that Rhodes's legacy would be forever bound to the Empire itself predominated. The *Saturday Review* believed that Rhodes would be remembered 'Beyond question', as 'one of the great men of history',¹⁶¹ applying to Rhodes's legacy Pericles's famous quote which begins 'The Whole earth is the tomb of heroic men...' The journal insisted that Rhodes's grave would not be the one he had chosen in the Matopos Hills but would be the British Empire itself.¹⁶² Similarly, *The Times* predicted that Rhodes would stand 'an heroic figure round which the traditions of Imperial history [would] cling'.¹⁶³

It is possible to divide the critical interpretation of Rhodes's legacy into two principal concerns. In the first instance, critics maintained that through his aggressive and coercive policies Rhodes had exacerbated the divisions between Briton and Boer thus rendering the Empire's position in South Africa potentially untenable. 'It is due to his life's work', the *Speaker* observed, 'that many well-informed persons do not believe that the British flag will remain long over the huge grave which covers the bones of this restless cosmopolitan.'¹⁶⁴

This was considered to be Rhodes's material legacy, his psychological legacy, while less perceptible, was considered no less damaging. Critics maintained that Rhodes had stirred in the breasts of his countrymen the lust of subjugation, and of having promoted a culture of immorality, prompting a corresponding deterioration of the Empire's reputation in the eyes of the world. This legacy of psychological harm was most evident in South Africa, where it appeared that Rhodes's principal legacy would be one of racial discord, between Briton and Boer, and between black and white.

The health of Anglo-Boer relations was predominant in, but did not entirely monopolise, the thoughts of contemporaries. A small

¹⁶¹ *Saturday Review*, 29 March 1902, pp.388-389.

¹⁶² *Ibid*: April 5 1902, pp.420-421.

¹⁶³ *The Times*, 27 March 1902, p.7.

¹⁶⁴ *Speaker*, 12 April 1902, p.31.

number of critics pondered the future of Afro-European relations and were equally critical of Rhodes's legacy. He was charged with having sown the seeds of resentment by stimulating the 'inordinate contempt of the whites for the blacks...making them tyrants instead of protectors, [and] thus destroying the morality of the superior, the safety of the inferior race'.¹⁶⁵

IX

The first details of Rhodes's will began to emerge within days of his death. On 28 March *The Times* revealed the clause which provided for his burial in the Matopos Hills and named his executors. On 5 April, after his funeral at Cape Town and before his burial in Rhodesia, *The Times* published the sections of the will directly interesting to the public. In what was to become a familiar analogy, the journal evoked the name of Caesar, and immediately declared Rhodes his modern incarnation.¹⁶⁶

Contemporaries were impressed both by the magnificence of the will and its simplicity. Personal clauses, such as his ruminations on the grandeur of the Matopos Hills and his desire to be buried at a place he called the 'View of the World' revealed to the public a human quality in Rhodes they had never known before. Such heartfelt expressions, *The Times* confessed, 'touches a chord which vibrates in the universal human heart', and 'brings the man nearer to most of us in his death than he ever was or perhaps could ever have been in his life'.¹⁶⁷

The clauses which drew the most direct parallels with the will of Caesar were his gifts of land and property. Part of the estate upon which his burial ground was to be located would be developed as a great public park, linked by railway to Bulawayo. Elsewhere, his

¹⁶⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1902, p.10.

¹⁶⁶ *The Times*, 5 April 1902, p.11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*: p11.

estates at Inyanga in Mashonaland were to be cultivated, and various projects established to further his interests in forestry and agriculture, including the establishment of an Agricultural College. In Cape Town his lands under Table Mountain were bequeathed for public use, while his principal residence 'Groote Schuur' was entrusted to the state with the stipulation that it should constitute the official residence of all future Prime Ministers of a federated South Africa.

Rhodes's generosity was by no means unprecedented. His generation had produced many great philanthropists, such as Rockefeller, Stanford and Carnegie. As the philosopher F.C.S. Schiller explained, what distinguished Rhodes's will and captured the public imagination was his scheme for the unification of the Anglo-Saxon race, and the novel way in which he set about achieving his goal.¹⁶⁸

Rhodes's will provided for the creation of sixty scholarships, each to the value of £300 annually, created with the intention of enabling American, Colonial, and German students to study at the University of Oxford. As Schiller had argued it reflected a generational concern that with the preservation of the Empire, and the belief that in the future this would be held together not by coercion but by the spiritual bonds of a common civilization. As the *Saturday Review* explained, Rhodes understood that the strongest bonds of friendship were established between individuals who study together in their formative years. He believed this would engender a sense of loyalty and attachment to the mother country, and that the leaders of tomorrow would inform the views of their countrymen.¹⁶⁹ In addition to the scholarships Rhodes bequeathed £100,000 to his own alma mater, Oriel College, for the extension of the college buildings, the

¹⁶⁸ *Fortnightly Review*, May 1902, pp.814-820.

¹⁶⁹ *Saturday Review*, 12 April 1902, pp.453-454.

enhancement of Fellowships, improvement of the High Table, and for general repairs.¹⁷⁰

To many contemporaries the will stood as a remarkable testament to the ambition, vision and humanity of the Empire's most famous son. Practical benefits to the scheme were discerned: residence in Oxford would broaden the views of colonists, instruct them in life and manners, and in time links between the colonies and the mother country would 'grow stronger by pleasant intercourse'.¹⁷¹ The scholarships would help to propagate the 'imperial idea' and endow the Empire's sons with a common sense of origin.¹⁷² The *Speaker* admitted that in Britain Rhodes's will had been greeted with a 'chorus of admiration', while complaining that this reaction had been largely stimulated by Rhodes's friends.¹⁷³

Upon closer scrutiny critics began to discern weaknesses with the scholarship programme. The will provoked a national debate as to health of English Universities vis-à-vis their American and German counterparts, and the comparison was seldom favourable. Assessments were made of Oxford's financial health and questions asked as to its viability as an 'Imperial University'.¹⁷⁴ Labouchere described Britain's educational arrangements as obsolete and facetiously suggested that Rhodes would have rendered greater service to his country had he arranged for British students to be sent to American and German Universities instead.¹⁷⁵

There were further criticisms pertaining to both the allocation of the scholarships and the effect these would have on the academic community of Oxford. It was argued that a truly imperial scheme ought to have limited the scholarships to students from the Empire.

¹⁷⁰ Stead, pp.20-45; also *The Times*, 5 April 1902, p.14.

¹⁷¹ *Blackwood's Magazine*, May 1902, pp.698-710 (p.708).

¹⁷² *Daily Chronicle*, 7 April 1902, p.4.

¹⁷³ *Speaker*, 5 April 1902, pp.4-5.

¹⁷⁴ *The Times*: 15 May 1902, p.5; 20 May 1902, p.7; 22 May 1902, p.10; *Saturday Review*, 12 April 1902, pp.453-454.

¹⁷⁵ *Truth*, 10 April 1902, p.911.

Alternatively, if the scholarships represented a return to the noble tradition of sponsoring the furtherance of knowledge, it ought to have been opened to the world. Moreover, Colonials were already in residence and as the Rhodes scholars would be dispersed throughout the University there were reservations as to their capacity to fulfil Rhodes's expectations.¹⁷⁶ It was only necessary to recall the name of the Cambridge graduate Jan Smuts, the incumbent Attorney-General of the Transvaal, to demonstrate that an English education in itself was not enough to surmount national loyalties.¹⁷⁷

It was as though the will had provided the blueprints to the workings of Rhodes's mind, for his champions this served to showcase the benevolence of the man, while for his enemies the broad strokes and blurred lines were indications of his ignorance and simplicity, of great ambitions built upon the meagerest philosophical and moral foundations, inclining towards ruthlessness and the abuse of power. As Labouchere observed:

It shows what a dangerous man Mr Rhodes was, what a worshipper of mere bigness in his conceptions, how careless or ignorant of the details on which the success of a scheme depends, and how indifferent to the means by which he thought his ends might be attained.¹⁷⁸

The *Manchester Guardian* diagnosed the same deficiencies in both the document and the man. As with his political career, the will revealed a germ of greatness – there was evidence of vision, generosity, even humanity – it was Rhodes's tragedy that his methods had consistently corrupted his noble intentions. The *Guardian* concluded:

In the light of that document Mr Rhodes's career is seen to be more of a tragedy than was generally suspected. It is the tragedy of a mind with many of the elements of greatness which, untrained and uneducated, matured into ideals whose vastness is less astonishing than their crudity, and into

¹⁷⁶ *Speaker*, 19 April 1902, pp.69-70.

¹⁷⁷ *Daily Chronicle*, 7 April 1902, p.4.

¹⁷⁸ *Truth*, 17 April 1902, p.988.

schemes which for want of mere common sense ended in personal disaster and the shipwreck of a great province.¹⁷⁹

Rhodes appeared to have overreached himself in death as in life. Like his 'Cape to Cairo' scheme there was a sense that his ideas were 'more grandiose than practical'.¹⁸⁰ It appeared that he had been corrupted by power and seduced into believing that he could manipulate forces beyond his control. It was as though he had considered the amalgamation of the Kimberley diamond mines and had attempted to apply the same principals, first to the unification of South Africa and finally to the wider world. His apparent failure to effect the comparatively modest objective of South African federation inevitably provoked cynicism as to his ability to affect a wider union.

The principal concept of the will - the domination of the Anglosphere – provoked an ideological backlash among British Radicals. It was argued that the peaceful organisation of the world would not be achieved by the subjection of other races but by their willing and equal cooperation. Not by the destruction of national differences but by a spirit of mutual tolerance and respect.¹⁸¹

The practical implications of reconciling such differences were immediately apparent. There were technical questions as how the colonies were to be accommodated in an English-speaking union, how were Colonial loyalties be reconciled with that of a wider imperial patriotism, and how would the United States of America be induced to return to the imperial fold. Labouchere scoffed at the notion, insisting that 'Financially, they are annexing us, whilst we have been annexing swamps and deserts in Africa.' Rhodes's dream of a *Pax Britannica*, he argued, could only be affected by the Empire's absorption into the American Republic, a process likely to be burdened with seemingly insoluble constitutional objections.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1902, p.5.

¹⁸⁰ *Truth*, 10 April 1902, p.911.

¹⁸¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1902, p.5.

¹⁸² *Truth*, 15 May 1902, pp.1242-1244.

The omnipresent accusation of disloyalty was also applied to the will. It marked the genesis of a criticism which has persisted to the present, the notion that the will represented a first step towards the creation of a one-world government – not in the interests of humanity, but in the interests of monopoly capitalism. In the parlance of the *Speaker*, the will appeared to demonstrate that Rhodes's true intention was the creation of a 'great Anglo-American syndicate controlling the Universe'. It appeared to offer final proof that Rhodes 'had no faith in his country, but [rather] an unlimited belief in the power of English-speaking financiers'.¹⁸³

In Britain, the significance of the will appears to have been less in its practical application, and more in its ability to inspire, both as an expression of prodigious generosity and in its encapsulation of an ideal. Perhaps the will's greatest significance was its restorative effect upon Rhodes's reputation. The will stood as an eloquent retort to those who had attempted to reduce the 'imperial idea' – and in particular, Rhodes's interpretation of the concept – to one of base self-interest. Recognising the restorative effect of the will the *Daily Chronicle* explained:

...no friend of Mr Rhodes could have desired to see a more splendid refutation of the misconceptions and the calumnies which represented the dead man as a self-seeker, animated by low and personal ends. To such accusations he has made a posthumous reply the force of which consists not only in the grand scale of its generosity, but yet more in the grand scale of its ideas.¹⁸⁴

In the weeks immediately prior to Rhodes's death Labouchere had expressed himself 'sincerely sorry' to learn of the plight of his erstwhile adversary. Though moved to oppose Rhodes's schemes he again confessed a 'secret admiration and liking for him'.¹⁸⁵ Labouchere's nephew and biographer A.L. Thorold would subsequently explain that his uncle believed that Rhodes's

¹⁸³ *Speaker*, 12 April 1902, pp.30-31.

¹⁸⁴ *Daily Chronicle*, 7 April 1902, p.4.

¹⁸⁵ *Truth*: 13 March 1902, p.679 and 10 April 1902, p.911.

imperialism was merely 'a mask to cover the desire for financial expansion'. Labouchere did not think badly of Rhodes personally, Thorold added, as 'He thought that he deceived himself in perfectly good faith.'¹⁸⁶

Of all the lyrical tributes dedicated to Rhodes, perhaps the most poignant was the one erroneously entitled 'Cecil James Rhodes', published in Labouchere's journal *Truth*. It perfectly encapsulated the restorative effect of the will, and the degree to which it had served to clarify Rhodes's much-maligned intentions:

Cecil James (sic) Rhodes

All that was greatest in the man just dead

With force augmented now to us appeals;

All that was noblest in his gifts, inbred,

Death, half relenting of its blow, reveals.

And 'midst that mourning for his early doom,

Which all the storms of controversy stills,

We place this tribute on his rock-hewn tomb

Amongst his dearly-loved Matoppo Hills!

And see! from that lone grave of his there shines

A ray of light, which none can fail to mark,

Serving to clearer make his life's desires,

And to make brighter deeds that once seemed dark.

Nay, aided by this penetrating flame,

We even read the secrets of his heart,

And learn it was with no mere sordid aim

¹⁸⁶ Thorold, A.L. *The Life of Henry Labouchere*, Constable, London 1913, p.435.

He boldly played his Empire-making part.
Gold he amassed, but, much as he acquired,
He never stooped to Mammon as a slave;
Money to him was dross; what he desired
Was the potential force that money gave.
He knew – who better? – most men had their price;
That lucre is a synonym for fame;
He had to play 'gainst Fortune's loaded dice,
And so he hoarded counters for the game.

Forgiving, then, the deeds we can't forget,
Let us those brilliant gifts of his recall
Which, 'midst the venal scheming of his set,
Made him on England's greatness stake his all;
And which, his battle-flag for ever furled,
Moved him, concerned for England's mental health,
To boldly preach to a bewildered world
The Gospel (as it should be preached) of Wealth!

Yes, howsoever strongly we dissent
From this or that he did or sought to do,
'Tis surely in his strange last testament
We see how great he was – how staunch – how true.
And so his epitaph we need not write,
For ere the record of his life was closed
He in his Will, in words of living light,

Had for himself a matchless one composed!¹⁸⁷

W.T. Stead described the will as 'one of those human documents which reveal character as the lightning flash reveals the dark recesses of a forest'.¹⁸⁸ It appeared to offer final proof as to the purity of his intentions. One could vehemently oppose Rhodes's aims – as Labouchere did – but one could not attribute to them selfish or pecuniary incentives. As the *Saturday Review* acknowledged:

If his ideals are vain, he at any rate has ideals and is an idealist: the man who has great ideas, and lives for them, working out a scheme whereby after his death his money may go to translate those ideas into practice, cannot be a small man, and cannot have a vulgar mind. Such a man may be open to attack on many sides, but it is useless to attempt to belittle him. They but belittle themselves who do.¹⁸⁹

Critics acknowledged the will to be Rhodes's greatest achievement, dwarfing even the Cape to Cairo scheme in its scope and ambition. In this context the will was received as an act of atonement, his benevolence a partial recompense for the great errors of his life.¹⁹⁰ The revelation of Rhodes's humanitarianism served to heighten the sense of regret at Rhodes's death. As the *Fortnightly Review* lamented:

How great a loss Cecil Rhodes is to the Empire has been realised more clearly, as the documents he has left behind have been understood.¹⁹¹

This delayed appreciation of Rhodes was intelligible to contemporaries on the grounds that his career had been forged in South Africa, and as a comparatively inarticulate man of action his intentions had been open to unfavourable construction. Great contemporaries such as Gladstone benefited from oratorical

¹⁸⁷ *Truth*, 10 April 1902, p.911.

¹⁸⁸ *Review of Reviews*, May 1902, p.471.

¹⁸⁹ *Saturday Review*, 12 April 1902, pp.453-454.

¹⁹⁰ *Westminster Review*, October 1902, pp.357-365; also *Speaker*, 16 August 1902, pp.537-538.

¹⁹¹ *Fortnightly Review*, June 1902, pp.1024-1034.

eloquence and an immediacy which enabled them to impress upon the public mind the full depth of their character. Rhodes, in contrast, had remained a 'sombre and incomplete outline', an impenetrable character whose intentions had been repeatedly misconstrued. The will became an apologia both for Rhodes and the cause of late nineteenth century imperialism. As the *Monthly Review* subsequently explained: '...public opinion turned from the interpretation of the man by his actions to the reading of those actions by the light of the mind from which they came. And in so doing it turned in Mr Rhodes's favour'.¹⁹²

¹⁹² *Monthly Review*, May 1902, pp.1-9 (pp.1-2).

Conclusion

Rhodes's career was coterminous with the zenith of British imperialism. At the time of his death his name had become so synonymous with the imperial idea that the *Saturday Review* found itself asking: 'Did Rhodes make Imperialism, or did Imperialism make Rhodes?'¹ When members of the Royal Colonial Institute convened in London a short time later, the chairman declared that the writings of Seeley, the speeches of Parkin, the verses of Kipling, and the actions and character of Rhodes had saved Britain from the 'rot' of Little Englandism.²

That imperialism was the preponderant ideology of the 1890s cannot be doubted. In 1899 the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, William Leonard Courtney, declared:

The only political sentiment which strongly moves the imagination of the nation as a whole at this period, is the passion for empire. Nothing that Mr John Morley or Sir William Harcourt can say, will remove the fact that Mr Rhodes and Mr Rudyard Kipling are more influential and representative personages of the age than either of them.³

In *Truth*, Labouchere complained that the nation had been 'smitten with madness', and that the imperialists had 'hoodwinked the majority' with their 'grandiose professions'.⁴ The *Monthly Review* simply confirmed, 'we are all Imperialists now'.⁵ However, this was not entirely true. While few advocated that the Empire should be immediately discarded – as the Radical MP Robert Wallace reluctantly admitted: '...we have inherited the estate and we must perform the landlord's duty' – there were degrees of imperialism.⁶

It has been the contention of this thesis that as the embodiment of expansionist imperialism the career of Cecil Rhodes facilitates an

¹ *Saturday Review*, 5 April 1902, pp.420-421.

² *The Times*, 1 May 1902, p.10.

³ *Fortnightly Review*, July 1899, pp.1-16.

⁴ *Truth*, 17 April 1902, p.990.

⁵ *Monthly Review*, May 1902, pp.1-9 (p.3).

⁶ *Contemporary Review*, June 1899, pp.782-799.

analysis of these different perceptions. As the Radical journals acknowledged, the principal distinction lay, not between imperialists and anti-imperialists, but in the conception of empire; between those who, like Rhodes, regarded territory as 'everything',⁷ and those who measured greatness 'not by square miles but by righteousness'.⁸

In response to John M MacKenzie's proposition that late nineteenth century society was defined by an 'ideological cluster', consisting of militarism, an identification and worship of national heroes, and racial ideas associated with Social Darwinism, this thesis broadly concurs.⁹

At the time of his death numerous commentators identified Rhodes as a Social Darwinist, long before that term had gained widespread currency. The *Manchester Guardian* went so far as to suggest that 'The common cant of the day about the survival of the fittest seem[ed] to have served him sufficiently as an ultimate basis of his ethics.'¹⁰

Rhodes had been markedly influenced by William Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man*,¹¹ which one writer described as a 'substitute Bible for many secularists'.¹² Reade rejected Christianity in favour of an impersonal Creator who was to be worshipped through one's service to humanity. Reade also informed Rhodes's view of both morality and mortality. There was no conception of heaven or hell in Reade's philosophy, and there was to be no judgement. With death, 'All is at an end for the unit', Reade explained, '...but all is not at an end for the actual Man, the true Being, the glorious One.'¹³ The 'glorious One' referred to mankind,

⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1897, p.4.

⁸ *Daily Chronicle*, 25 November 1893, p.4.

⁹ MacKenzie, p.2.

¹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1902, p.5.

¹¹ Reade, William Winwood, *The Martyrdom of Man*, Trubner and Co., London, 1872.

¹² Smith, Warren Sylvester, *The London Heretics*, Dodd, Mead, and Company, New York, 1968, p.5.

¹³ Reade, p.537.

and those who served its cause were identified as 'patriots of the planet'.¹⁴

One contemporary described Rhodes's philosophy as 'Positivism limited to British humanity', hinting at the narrower definition Rhodes applied to Reade's ideology.¹⁵ In this sense, Rhodes could more accurately be described as a 'race patriot'. The effect was ultimately the same. In the absence of an afterlife the creation of an earthly Utopia assumed greater importance, a characteristic which contemporaries readily associated with Rhodes's 'grandiose' plans for English-speaking unity and its by-product, universal peace. It also had the effect of liberating the individual from the constraints of conventional morality, a characteristic which contemporaries identified with Rhodes's methods.

Among the most distinctive features of the philosophy was the strength of faith with which it endowed its adherents. In this connection, Dicey would later recall that Rhodes's faith was of the Scriptural kind that 'can move mountains'.¹⁶ This faith was not predicated on Christianity. Contemporaries occasionally referred to Rhodes as a 'pagan', there were numerous references to his reverence for nature, his fabled description of Table Mountain as his church - the place where we would go to formulate his 'Big ideas' for the betterment of humanity - perhaps the closest definition we have to Rhodes's concept of religion.

Rhodes's notion of a distinct Anglo-Saxon race was considered a 'loose unscientific idea' even by imperialist journals, and this incoherence was manifested not least in his close personal and political associations with such 'non-Anglo-Saxons' as Afrikaners and Jews.¹⁷ However, the notion of English-speaking or Anglo-Saxon unity had broad generational appeal. In the days following Rhodes's

¹⁴ Ibid: p.539.

¹⁵ *Fortnightly Review*, May 1902, pp.741-761 (pp.756-757).

¹⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, May 1902, pp.762-770 (p.769).

¹⁷ *Saturday Review*, 12 April 1902, pp.453-454.

death another titan of the age, the Scottish-American industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, expressed the belief that race patriotism would be the next great force in the world, supplementing, but not supplanting, the narrower sentiments of national patriotism. Carnegie declared that 'Great Britain, an alien in Europe, must look across the Atlantic to those of her own blood. It is but a small step', he concluded, 'to a federal council of peace within the race.'¹⁸ It was this prospect of universal peace which inspired Rhodes and this new breed of 'race patriots'.

Contemporaries observed the propensity of imperialists to sacrifice the present for the future. Chamberlain described it as the need to 'break eggs in-order to make omelettes'. Iwan-Muller wrote of Rhodes specifically: 'It was of the England of the future that he was always thinking and for which he laboured and suffered and fought.'¹⁹ It was also reflected more broadly in the aspiration of imperialists to 'peg out claims for posterity'. Bending the rules of morality in the interests of a seemingly benevolent ideal was not in itself a novel concept. Nevertheless, contemporaries identified it as a distinguishing characteristic of those influenced by what critics contemptuously referred to as the pseudo-science of the day. The Bishop of Lincoln, E.L. Hicks, described the effects of this seductive creed upon its adherents:

It is the belief that when a cause is good, is wise, is evidently marked out by Providence, or Fate, or Evolution – or whatever deity a man believes in – as "inevitable", then the man who has the insight to perceive this drift of things, this beckoning finger of Fate, is justified in helping forward the course of nature and forcing the hand of destiny.²⁰

The essayist Sidney Low contended that in Rhodes's mind 'right and wrong were to be judged by large cosmic standards, not by the rules of a morality which...he thought merely conventional. His vision

¹⁸ *The Times*, 7 April 1902, p.3.

¹⁹ *Fortnightly Review*, May 1902, pp.741-761 (pp.756-757).

²⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1902, p.10.

of the future was too vivid to be blurred by such considerations'.²¹ Similarly Iwan-Muller noted that Rhodes 'sacrificed...narrow and immediate altruism to the wider and the more remote...his kingdom was not of this world, if by this world we mean those actually living, moving, and having their being in it'.²² In reaching over the present to grasp at the future Rhodes was careless of the human obstacles in his path.

Whether militarism was a by-product of imperialism was a contentious issue. It has been argued that the social application of Darwinism impressed upon the public mind the sense that war was an inevitable consequence of civilization.²³ In the case of the Empire builder – of which Rhodes was the archetypal example - faith in the imperial idea was not infrequently accompanied by an acceptance that death and destruction incurred in the pursuit of imperial objectives could be justified. If Darwinian principles demonstrated the inevitable march of European civilization across Africa, then militarism was merely the instrument by which human progress could be facilitated. The contemporary theologian, E.L. Hicks, argued that to the imperialist's mind such reasoning provided a moral justification for war:

To employ a timely violence is to assist nature. It is like the wise employment of surgery to facilitate an otherwise impeded growth and liberate activities which were in peril of being stifled. Violence, indeed, in itself may be undesirable, but if it assists in the development of human destiny it is safe, it is even merciful. Evil ceases to be evil when it is employed with noble motives for a noble end. It is (in short) right to do evil that good may come. And so we arrive at the Jesuitic maxim as applied to empire-building.²⁴

Aside from a popular interest in the armed forces which, as MacKenzie suggests, was a response in part to the fear of militarist European nationalisms and the recurrent invasion scares of the

²¹ *Nineteenth Century*, May 1902, pp.828-840 (p.839).

²² *Fortnightly Review*, May 1902, pp.741-761 (p.756).

²³ MacKenzie, pp.5-7.

²⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1902, p.10.

nineteenth century,²⁵ there was at its heart an altruistic dimension to late Victorian militarism. It must also be acknowledged that Rhodes was not alone in his conception of global empire as a peace-giving force, not only in terms of its ultimate objectives, but in its ideological influence upon the society. Defenders of the imperialist creed maintained that as empires grew the instinct for self-preservation grew feeble, 'dissolved in a habit of security that [is] never disturbed'.²⁶ The rejection of large numbers of British men for service in the South African War due to their poor physical condition, in conjunction with the Army's performance in the opening exchanges of the war, only served to heighten concerns that the empire's martial vigour was in greater danger of degeneration than hypertrophy.

The opposing view was unequivocally expressed by *Reynolds's Newspaper* in its assertion that 'Imperialism means militarism.'²⁷ It appeared to be the inevitable consequence of acquiring and defending vast tracts of territory. The conquest of Matabeleland, the Jameson Raid, and – for many critics – the South African War itself, demonstrated the willingness of Rhodes and his associates to resort to violence in pursuit of their objectives. In this context critics asserted that the philosophy of militarism was predicated on the willingness to commit evil that good may come.

Both critics and supporters believed that the spirit of imperialism was transmitted home. For the former this was cause for concern. As Robert Wallace inquired: 'Is that man with his divine right of conquest, and gospel of driving the weak to the wall for the gain of the strong, a likely one to fight the battle of the degraded or oppressed at home?' In his ruthlessness, his alleged duplicity, and his willingness to combine money and politics, Rhodes appeared to typify the moral degradation which aggressive imperialism

²⁵ MacKenzie, p.5.

²⁶ *Monthly Review*, November 1900, pp.1-10.

²⁷ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 25 March 1899, p.1.

engendered. Once again, contemporaries recognised Darwinian influences, as the *Manchester Guardian* explained:

From a shallow study of the outlines of the theory of evolution a surprisingly large number of people had recently derived the notion that to get the better of everybody one can, nationally if not individually, is a piece of laudable conformity to natural tendencies which make for the perfection of the world. The idea is as remote from science as from morals, but its vogue in our period of half-educated transition from general popular ignorance to – let us hope – general intelligence has been tremendous...²⁸

Contemporary responses to Rhodes's career also highlight a morally uplifting conception of imperialism. As J. Lawson Walton explained, the imperialist was 'convinced that the discharge of the duties of his great inheritance ha[d] an educational influence and a morally bracing effect on the character of the British people...'²⁹ This was buttressed by the belief that the decline and fall of the Empire would engender a sense of failure which would in itself demoralise the nation.³⁰ Proponents of the imperial creed believed that territorial expansion was to the nation, what exercise was to the individual. In their search for new lands to develop Rhodes and his pioneers were a potent symbol of the nation's vigour.³¹

The acquisition of Zambesia and Rhodes's dream of a Cape to Cairo railway provoked a national debate as to the wisdom of carving out a new empire in Central Africa. It is clear that material considerations predominated, as one contemporary acknowledged, the question as to how such schemes would impact upon the indigenous population was 'hardly noticed'.³² To critics it represented an 'African mirage', originating from the acquirement of Egypt and the Cape, and the grandiose idea of filling in the places in between.³³ It represented territory of doubtful economic value, unfit for European

²⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 March 1902, p.5.

²⁹ *Contemporary Review*, March 1899, pp.305-310.

³⁰ *Saturday Review*, 10 January 1902, pp.49-50.

³¹ *Fortnightly Review*, 1 August 1889, p.177.

³² *Nineteenth Century*, September 1890, pp.478-487 (p.486).

³³ *Truth*, 10 April 1902, pp.923-924.

colonisation, purchased at the expense of domestic reform and international peace.

Rhodes and his apparently monopolistic Chartered Company emerged as the symbolic opponents of Free Trade; a policy which appeared equally threatened by Rhodes's concept of imperial federation, beginning with his offer on behalf of Rhodesia of a preferential tariff to the Imperial Government. A legacy of Free Trade ideology was the belief that only the land-owning class benefited from protection, from this developed the notion that the empire was becoming a vast protectionist enterprise. Rhodes's compound system and the political influence of De Beers at Kimberley, the accusations of forced-labour in Rhodesia, and the preponderance of the capitalist interest at Johannesburg forged a link in the contemporary mind between the empire-builder and the land owning class at home, a link strengthened in the aftermath of the Jameson inquiry by rumours of a political alliance between Rhodes and British ministers.

To his supporters, in contrast, Rhodes appeared to offer a solution to the increasingly discredited policy of Free Trade, which one imperialist journal characterised as a 'sordid utopia'.³⁴ Britain's industrial pre-eminence had been eroded, and rival Powers had set prohibitive tariffs against British manufactures. It appeared increasingly necessary to carve out new markets for trade and to develop the 'imperial estates'. Support for Rhodes's schemes also reflected the exaggerated generational concern for the surplus population at home, and the apparent necessity of acquiring new 'swarming grounds abroad'.³⁵

The development of Rhodesia appeared to offer an imperial counterpoise to the separatist ambitions of the Transvaal Boers, while the Cape to Cairo railway promised to give Britain 'the balance

³⁴ *Saturday Review*, 10 January 1903, pp.49-50.

³⁵ *Ibid*: 9 November 1889, pp.507-508.

of the map'. The latter factors in particular reflected the overriding belief that Britain should not be left behind in the pursuit of African Empire. We are reminded of the *Manchester Guardian's* words: 'Now is the time for races which have it in them to expand. A century hence and perhaps it will be too late';³⁶ or the *Saturday Review's* fatalistic warning that 'the choice only lies between expansion and contraction. We need not be always seizing fresh territory, but we must put the best part of our manhood into developing what we have or slip gradually, or rapidly, into the position of Switzerland and Belgium'.³⁷

Attitudes towards the Chartered Company's acquisition of Zambesia validate Bernard Porter's assessment that anti-imperialist sentiment in the 1890s was dominated by domestic and economic considerations.³⁸ Humanitarian concerns often provided ancillary arguments to buttress such positions but seldom formed the focus of contemporary criticism. Nevertheless, both the acquisition of Rhodesia and the Cape to Cairo railway were framed in humanitarian terms by its advocates. As the Liberal MP John Lawson Walton explained, the prevailing belief was 'that the spread of British rule extend[ed] to every race brought within its sphere the incalculable benefits of just law, tolerant trade, and considerate government'.³⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century this belief extended to both missionary and humanitarian groups, however, only the former tolerated Rhodes's brand of privatised imperialism and both favoured the expansion of direct imperial rule.

While this patriarchal ideology predominated, it did not pass unchallenged, and Rhodes's ruthless methods of acquisition focussed attention upon the morality of the issue as never before. Contemporaries were divided between those who considered the Empire to have been godlessly gained, and those who considered it

³⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 8 October 1889, p.9.

³⁷ *Saturday Review*, 10 January 1902, pp.49-50.

³⁸ Porter, Bernard, *Critics of Empire*, I.B. Tauris, London 2008, pp.33-34.

³⁹ *Contemporary Review*, March 1899, pp.305-310.

God-given; those who considered it a sacred trust and those who considered it a licence for larceny and oppression.

A majority shared Rhodes's philosophy that the English-speaking peoples represented the highest ideals of justice, liberty, and peace. There was almost universal acceptance that no undeveloped country could remain vacant for long, and that it would benefit the inhabitants of those countries, and the world at large, if they were to be ruled by Britain rather than by a rival power. Men such as E.L. Hicks, who questioned the Empire's right to subject one of the world's 'immortal races' to the violence of an 'operation' - in-order to cure its perceived deficiencies - represented a passionate minority.⁴⁰

Humanitarian concerns were most apparent in connection with Rhodes's methods. To critics the casualty disparities of the Matabele War appeared to exemplify the cruelties of conquest - a 'Holacust [sic] to the stream of advancing civilization'.⁴¹ To a majority, however, it represented deliverance for the Shona people - 'the true aborigines' - and the inevitable demise of a primitive despotism. The accusations of maladministration which followed the war were similarly qualified on the grounds that forcible inducement might be necessary in the first instance to draw Africans into the capitalist system. Tellingly, Rhodes shared Reade's conception of Africans as children. Just as one must order a child to school, Reade had argued, so one must order the 'uncivilised' man to work:

A man is not a slave in being compelled to work against his will, but in being compelled to work without hope and without reward...Enforced labour is undoubtedly a hardship, but it is...indispensable to progress. Mankind grows because men desire to better themselves in life, and this desire proceeds from the Inequality of Conditions.⁴²

The Chartered Company's treatment of Africans engendered a variety of racial opinions, ranging from biblically derived notions of

⁴⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1902, p.10.

⁴¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 5 November 1893, p.4.

⁴² Reade, p.507.

monogenesis to scientifically derived notions of immutable racial differences. Rhodes's own patriarchal assessment of Africans was perhaps the most widespread, rendering Rhodes, to a significant extent, a man of his times. Africans were to be provided with a societal framework predicated on order and justice, and would theoretically be at liberty to imbibe the civilizational influences of their British guardians. A process which even critics of Rhodes's 'native' policy estimated would take 'a century or two, till the savage ha[ad been] worked out of them'.⁴³

The *Speaker* was undoubtedly accurate in its assessment that the majority of Britons judged Rhodes 'kindly'. As the *Vossische Zeitung* observed, it would have been impossible for the Imperial Government to shield Rhodes in light of his various controversies had the people not been willing accomplices.⁴⁴

This is not to suggest that Rhodes and his Chartered Company were necessarily the preferred instruments of imperial expansion. On the contrary, the debate surrounding the desirability of chartered companies, the concerns of both missionary and humanitarian societies, in conjunction with the official explanations and justifications of Rhodes's actions, suggest that for many in Britain this was a partnership of convenience. We are reminded of Arnold-Forster's assessment in the aftermath of the Jameson Raid that the overriding concern of the British people was not to protect Rhodes or the conspirators but the maintenance of imperial interests, and to the extent that Rhodes was deemed imperative to this objective he was to be sustained.

Arnold-Forster was also correct in his assertion that if one took the balance of the British press, one would be forced to conclude 'that there was a unanimous feeling of admiration both for the institution and the man in all classes of English society'. The margin

⁴³ *Spectator*, 25 April 1891, pp.582-584.

⁴⁴ Views of the *Vossische Zeitung*, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 5 February 1897, p.5.

of support grew more pronounced as the century drew to a close, verifying the assertion that imperialism sold.

Anti-Rhodes imperialists formed a distinctive group, a notable example being the editor of the *National Review*, Leopold Maxse. They disliked his arrogance; his conveyance of the impression that he had singlehandedly 'invented the British Empire'. More specifically, they considered him reckless and questioned his loyalties. They never forgave him for having apparently sided with the Empire's enemies in the form of Parnell and the Bond, and they suspected him of playing for his own hand; did he mean to become a great imperial Viceroy, or the first President of South Africa? They shared the view of critics that Rhodes had lowered the 'British ideal', and in so doing had paid too high a price for his achievements.

Rhodes's imperialism drew support from all classes of the society, if the Radical press is to be believed, 'stock exchange bulls', and 'London hostesses' were overrepresented, as were members of the political and military establishment. There was also broad, popular support for his policies, if not necessarily for the man himself. The meetings and petitions of working men demonstrate that he won plaudits for his contributions to British trade and emigration. Conversely, labour leaders opposed his methods, his Company's allegedly poor working conditions, his replacement of white labour for black, and for the belief that whether it was De Beers at Kimberley, Gold Fields at Johannesburg, or the Chartered Company in Rhodesia, his companies represented dehumanising monopolistic capitalism with the accompanying loss of political and economic freedom.

In spite of his own Liberalism, Rhodes drew his staunchest support from the Unionist ranks. The Liberal Party, divided on the subject of imperialism, were as ineffective in opposing Rhodes as they were the Unionists. Similarly, Labouchere's small band of Radicals were defeated as much by their own hyperbole as by the

votes of their opponents. Both front benches demonstrated an unwillingness to act against Rhodes; this was most evident in the aftermath of the Jameson Raid. In addition to having granted the charter, the Unionists had a vested interest in shielding Chamberlain, and by extension Rhodes. Liberal ministers on the other hand had supervised the Matabele War and had developed their own contingency plans in the event of a revolution at Johannesburg. Moreover, the consensus of both front benches was that Rhodes could not be overtly punished without striking at the heart of imperial loyalty in South Africa.

This belief in Rhodes's necessity to the imperial cause may have been exaggerated; however, it was indicative of the changing relationship between the colonies and the mother country. On the one hand Rhodes demonstrated how a powerful colonial leader could relieve the burden of the imperial exchequer and wage proxy wars against Britain's rivals, on the other, he demonstrated how a 'machine-gun politician' in a distant outpost of the empire could embroil the imperial power in troubles which were none of its seeking.

For all that was innovative about Rhodes contemporaries also recognised him as the modern incarnation of an ancient ideology which has traditionally found its greatest expression among peoples in the vanguard of human progress. As the *Manchester Guardian* explained:

It is the dream of the empire-builder again, the man convinced of the Heaven-sent mission of himself and his nation to set the world right and govern inferior nations for their good...The domination of the world appears not as a mere means of glory but as a moral duty – to the conqueror a mere burden, to the vanquished a blessing. Possessed by such a creed, in which all the instincts of self-assertion get conscience on to their side, civilised nations go to lengths that under other circumstances they would never approach.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1902, p.5.

This begs the question, how typical was Rhodes of his generation, and to what extent did his values and the influences which formed them reflect the experiences of the wider society? Rhodes did not exist in a vacuum; he both informed and was informed by his generation. He was perhaps most accurately the foremost proponent of the imperialist creed, a man whose wealth and power enabled him to carry many of the generational influences to their logical conclusion; a man who exemplified 'the "robust" reasoning fashionable in his day', and whose career had provided 'the most striking example of its application'.⁴⁶ It is perhaps well to conclude with Sir Henry Newbolt that in certain respects Rhodes was the archetypal Englishman of his generation, a man 'who, in many of his ways, held up the mirror to John Bull himself'; however, in other respects he struck contemporaries with qualities which appeared 'un-English', both 'in the nature of his self-seeking and his unscrupulousness'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid: 27 March 1902, p.5.

⁴⁷ *Monthly Review*, May 1902, pp.1-9 (p.3).

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