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Rhodes, Rhodesia and the Jameson Raid

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Yet four more books have recently appeared on these closely related subjects;* and this, as the

* BUTLER, J. 1968 *The Liberal Party and the Jameson Raid*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

ROBERTS, B. 1969 *Cecil Rhodes and the Princess*. London, Hamish Hamilton.

GLASS, S. 1968 *The Matabele War*. London, Longmans.

SAMKANGE, S. 1968 *Origins of Rhodesia*. London, Heinemann.

author of one of them says, "might well cause scholars to groan".¹ Nevertheless, all four works, although different in character, are useful contributions to a subject that still arouses strong feelings, especially in Southern Africa.

There was a time a few years ago when the subject of the Jameson Raid seemed to be approaching exhaustion. A series of studies by South African historians had elaborated a strong case in favour of an overall Rhodes-Jameson plan for an uprising and a raid, to which support had been given by Joseph Chamberlain.² Other historians have tried to take the sting out of this charge against Chamberlain by insisting on a distinction between the uprising and the Raid.³ At the same time there has been a similar process in respect of Rhodes. A standard biography was published⁴ and some of the problems of the "Missing Telegrams"⁵ and Stead's *History*⁶ were cleared up; but the whole subject had begun to look more a matter of bibliographical rather than of historical research.⁷

Yet even then, unanswered questions remained. The biography of Rhodes was in many ways too

much a defence of a hero, and much of his strange character was left either unremarked or unexplained. In a review of Lockhart and Woodhouse's biography, Ranger doubted whether this was "The Last Word on Rhodes"; and he rightly pointed to the less publicised aspects of his character and policies.⁸

It is upon Rhodes' character that Brian Roberts now focuses more attention in his study of Rhodes and Princess Catherine Radziwill (*née* Rzewuski). This work is largely based on secondary sources, but the papers of Le Sueur have been used to throw some interesting sidelights on the relationship between the ailing Rhodes and the forceful princess who forged his signature to pay debts incurred in her publicising his policies. Furthermore, by careful use of his sources, the author has succeeded in drawing better character sketches of these two strange people than previous writers who have tended to steer away from any unpleasantness. Thus Roberts documents more fully than ever before the complicated emotional make-up of Rhodes, the squeaky misogynist surrounded by attractive, virile young men who acted as a sort of playful bodyguard. Although he never says quite as much, bluntly, it is clear from his sympathetic but unsentimental account that Rhodes was a man of strong, but almost certainly repressed, homosexuality.⁹

Whether this is of any importance, historically, is difficult to decide; but it is possible that

Rhodes' loneliness and emotional emptiness after Pickering's death in 1886 did contribute to, and so helps explain, his later actions which today we find so distasteful—the brash materialism, the ruthlessness towards the Matabele kingdom, the cruel solicitude for Lobengula's sons, the recklessness of the Johannesburg Rising and the Jameson Raid, the final cynicism of "equal rights for all civilised men".

In Roberts' account of Rhodes and the Princess there are two weaknesses, but both are probably determined by lack of documentation. The first is that there is little serious discussion of what Rhodes felt for (or against) this woman whose unwelcome friendship for him aggravated his last illness. It may well be right to dismiss any emotional entanglement; but if this is so, we are left with no convincing explanation of the hold over Rhodes that Princess Radziwill appeared to have. The author's attempt to answer this last point is the second weakness of his work: for he argues that the princess had stolen from Rhodes incriminating documents, perhaps the missing telegrams, concerning the Jameson Raid. There is, however, no real evidence for this answer, despite its dramatic attraction; and certainly the princess never produced the papers, either to avoid the sentence of two years' imprisonment or even to obtain money in her declining years of poverty.

It is to the question of the Raid that Professor Butler has directed his attention. This scholarly work, however, is different in character from most other works on the subject, the main interest of which has been to estimate the extent of Chamberlain's collusion. Butler is more concerned with the impact of the Raid and the Inquiry on British political life, and particularly on the Liberal Party in opposition. For it is rare that a colonial problem becomes a major issue in domestic politics; it seems unlikely, for example, that the illegal declaration of independence by Rhodesia in 1965 will be a subject of intense political conflict at the forthcoming general election in Britain in the way that the Jameson Raid of 1895 did in 1900.

This work then is more a case study in parliamentary technique and in political judgment, a study which raises questions of public morality and private knowledge. The essence of the study is the failure of the Liberal leaders, notably Sir William Harcourt, to exploit the Raid politically. According to Butler, this was due to the simple fact, ignored by historians, that Harcourt had exactly the same views as Chamberlain and his

other political contemporaries on the legitimacy of revolution, or intervention in support of the rights of suffering people. For this very reason, indeed, the Liberal government in 1894 had been prepared to intervene on behalf of the Uitlanders; and the disagreement between Liberals and Unionists was rather over means.

What neither party accepted, however, was that intervention should precede a rising or should be for private gain. On the first of these two counts, Rhodes was clearly guilty; and Chamberlain therefore denounced the Raid immediately he heard of it, before he knew whether it would succeed or not. Because of this action, Harcourt was prepared to defend Chamberlain. Similarly, Rhodes was not guilty of the second charge of mere money-making, and therefore Chamberlain, in turn, was prepared to defend him.

Thus the effective failure of the Inquiry to destroy Rhodes' influence or to enhance the popularity of the Liberal Party is no mystery: the role of Harcourt as a British statesman seeking to strengthen British foreign policy, and that of Chamberlain as an Imperial statesman holding the Empire together helped Rhodes, the Cape politician, to maintain the basis of his political power in South Africa.

In this detailed account by Butler there are two minor points that can be amplified by means of material in the Salisbury Archives. The first is the hitherto unpublished letter which Albert Grey wrote to Chamberlain on 17th November, 1895 (wrongly dated as 7th November in Butler's text, p. 56). The purpose of this letter was to remind Chamberlain that the British South Africa Company's "eagerness to get *immediate* Administration of the [Bechuanaland] Protectorate has been prompted by political considerations alone . . . [in order] to place ourselves in a position to help British interests in the Transvaal in the event of anything taking place there. . . ". Butler logically concludes that this shows Chamberlain to have gone further down the path of intervention than had his Liberal predecessor, although it does not prove guilty knowledge of a Raid *before* the Rising. The interesting point which Butler omits, however, is that this letter is not a copy, of which the original would be among Chamberlain's papers, but the original which, with its envelope, was never posted! Grey apparently had second thoughts: was it too blunt, too revealing, or was it an unfair reflection of which Chamberlain did in fact know?

The second point is the substance of Labou-

chère's accusation that "Chamberlain when he heard of the raid went to the office of the [Telegraph] Company and insisted on all the cablegrams being shown to him" (p. 169 quoting Labouchère to Harcourt, 7th May, 1897). This charge was not pursued at the Inquiry, but Butler raises the question of whether Chamberlain had in fact seen all the "missing telegrams" as early as January, 1896, and had taken action then to make sure that they were not produced. Another letter by Grey, however, appears to describe the episode in question and, in doing so, shows it to have been far less sinister than Labouchère thought: Grey, Maguire and Hawkesley went to the Eastern Telegraph Cable office late at night soon after the Raid to discover why there had been no news from the Cape for more than 24 hours. When they were told that the cable was blocked with government business, they drove to Chamberlain's house at 1.15 in the morning. Chamberlain returned with them and successfully demanded the production of the cables received *that day* [my italics] which they then read.¹⁰

The third book under discussion is a useful study of Rhodes and Jameson's previous gamble, their unprovoked war against the Ndebele in 1893. By careful use of the records of the British South Africa Company and of the High Commissioner, Glass is able to give a detailed, almost day-to-day, account of the progress of their highly successful aggression against Lobengula. As an explanation of the war, however, Glass' work is not satisfactory.

In the first place, Jameson and the Company are taken too much at the face value of their official communications. Ranger has shown that Jameson as early as 17th July, 1893, had virtually decided on the necessity of force: "unless some shooting is done I think it will be difficult to get labour even after they [Ndebele impi] have all gone . . . [therefore] I intend to treat them like dogs . . .". Two days later Jameson cynically added that "we have the excuse for a row over murdered women & children now & the getting Matabeleland open would give us a tremendous lift in shares . . .".¹¹

In the second place, the context within which the British South Africa Company was operating needs more attention. The financial burden of administering Mashonaland was so great, even after Jameson's ruthless cutting back, that the Company's only hope lay in taxing the Shona. In the absence of any legal right on the Company's part, the only argument which might carry weight with the Colonial Office was that the

Shona were being protected from the bloodthirsty depredations of Lobengula—and it was this crucial argument that the Victoria Incident threw into jeopardy.

Finally, and most importantly, the victims of his aggressive war, the Ndebele, are barely considered, certainly not in their own right as an African polity which had its own political and military problems and strategy.

The fourth book, by Samkange, stops short with these events of 1893 and concentrates upon the machinations of Rhodes that led to the occupation of Mashonaland and then, inevitably, to the Matabele War of 1893-1894. This also is a subject that has been gone over many times, but Samkange's contribution is a useful one by virtue of its detailed documentation. Good use is made of the official records of the British authorities to show the tortuous nature of Rhodes' plans and British connivance.

The definitive work on these decisive years, however, remains to be written, for there are obvious defects in Samkange's reconstruction. The whole work is marred by a shrillness of tone in dealing with Rhodes and the various treaties and concessions. Historians have long since ceased to think well of that unpleasant man; but to try to justify Lobengula as a man of his time and not to see Rhodes equally as a product of a jingoistic, grasping, materialistic age in Europe, is a one-sided and unhistorical approach. There is also a certain naivety in insisting that the side which won—Rhodes and the British authorities—was the only party to push its economic interests and behave dishonestly in that age of double-dealing concession-hunting. If this were just a polemical interpretation of the evidence, it would not matter so much, but in fact the polemical approach seems to have determined what evidence should be consulted and what ignored.

Thus by uncritical reliance on secondary works, such as Preller's untrustworthy *Lobengula*, the Boers' attitude to the Ndebele state becomes simply one of "sincerity and desire to maintain peace and friendly relations" (p. 44). The Adendorff Concession and Trek therefore receive no comment, although in intention this was a more blatant attempt at open seizure of Africans' land than either the Rudd or Lippert concessions.

Similarly there is no attempt to look at the evidence in the Salisbury Archives, some of which Ranger has published,¹² concerning the exact way in which the conquest of Mashonaland came about. Johnson and Selous had their own interests, notably in the Mazoe area, and Rhodes

in some ways became enmeshed in their ambitions.

Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, is the fact that evidence concerning the Ndebele is ignored: no attention to the work of Brown and the segmentary nature of their state, for example; no consideration of a possible division of economic interest between the younger men of the regiments who could advance only by preserving the traditional political-military structure and the older men at Bulawayo who could profit from concessionaires and the development of trade. In effect this work is as European-orientated as Glass'; and by its shrillness of tone reads rather like a nineteenth century British Liberal's attack on the British South Africa Company rather than

a considered historical analysis by an African of the interaction of British imperialism and an African polity; and, as Professor Butler's work shows in respect of Labouchère at the time of the Inquiry (here, p. 125, made into a "Labour" M.P.), inaccurate denunciations sometimes have the effect of helping those who ought to be condemned.

It is a sad comment on present race relations in Rhodesia that such a tone should be felt necessary in a historical work dealing with events 80 years ago; it is some excuse for such an approach—and an even sadder comment on race relations—that this book is banned to Rhodesia's general reading public.

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