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Sir Matthew Nathan
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN
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# Contents

List of illustrations and maps vi
Acknowledgements vii
Introduction 1
1 The Anglo-Jewish Soldier, 1862–1899 5
2 Sierra Leone, 1899 37
3 The Gold Coast, 1900–1904 57
4 Hong Kong, 1904–1907 102
5 Natal, 1907–1909 127
6 England and Ireland, 1910–1916 174
7 England and Queensland, 1916–1939 208
8 The Gentleman Careerist 235
Select Bibliography 247
Index 273
Illustrations and Maps

ILLUSTRATIONS

Sir Matthew Nathan  

Frontispiece

MAPS

1  Sierra Leone, 1899  
2  The Gold Coast, 1901  
3  Hong Kong, 1904  
4  Natal, 1907

40  
60  
104  
129
Acknowledgements

In another form, chapters 2—5 of this biography first saw the light as a doctoral dissertation at Yale University. I am grateful to Yale for its support and its excellent facilities over my sojourn there from 1963 to 1967, during which time I had the financial assistance of Yale’s Councils on International Relations and African Studies for research in England and Africa during 1966. For grants to support later research in Ireland, England and Queensland, I express my gratitude to the Myer Foundation and to La Trobe University.

I have had the cooperation and help of archivists and librarians of all the institutions listed in the bibliography but I must especially thank the staffs of the Bodleian and Rhodes House libraries of Oxford University, where the extensive collection of Nathan Papers is housed.

Relatives and friends of Sir Matthew Nathan have assisted me greatly with recollections and papers; I particularly thank Sir Matthew’s nephew and great-niece, Robert Nathan and Mrs Joan Longden. Others who willingly responded to my requests for help were Sir Leslie and Lady Farrer, Sir Robert Hall, Rev. G.A. Nicholson, Rev. Raphael H. Levy, G.B. Orr and Michael J. Ball, the present owner of the manor house, West Coker.

As the supervisor of my postgraduate work at Yale University, Robin W. Winks first brought the Nathan Papers to my attention and thereafter sustained the research in many ways for which I am indebted to him. His enviable capacity to revitalize his students when the sheer weight of material threatens to engulf them, his experienced and unerring editorial hand and his wide-ranging knowledge of British colonial history have all contributed, and on
many occasions, to this project. To these reasons why I have special reason to be grateful to Robin Winks I would add another: the skill with which he and his New Zealand-born wife Avril diagnose and cure the particular form of culture shock to which Commonwealth students are prone on first visiting the United States.

Other scholars have contributed with their expertise to the research and interpretation; I wish especially to thank Maynard William Swanson and Colin Webb for their help with the Natal chapter; Michael Crowder (Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast); George Endacott (Hong Kong); Frank Martin and Leon O Broin (Ireland); and Alan Martin and Roger Joyce (Queensland).

To all these friends I offer my gratitude and my apology for any errors that outlived their advice and assistance. They will understand if I reserve my greatest thanks for my wife, Athalie, who in a literal sense has lived with the project and has sustained it, and me, through its long gestation. For that support, for her attempts to make me decrease the length of my sentences and increase their sense, and for much else besides, it is a very special pleasure to me to dedicate this book to Athalie.

*Anthony P. Haydon,*
*Melbourne, 1975.*
Introduction

Rapid and continuing decolonization in regions once administered by Britain and by such colonial offshoots as Australia has turned attention from "Government House history". Scholarly interest has moved on from issues such as how the empire grew and even from how it fell apart. Not what the rulers did but what the ruled were suffering under, reacting to and selecting from the colonial experience are now the major research concerns.

Like any reorientation clearly influenced by contemporary events, this trend has left some gaps while it filled others. Among the gains has been a valuable new perspective on military rebellions against colonial rule—now labelled "primary resistance movements" and giving us a new insight into the motives and techniques of the insurgents. Another, as yet incomplete, has given us a developing appreciation of the pre-colonial history and cultures of African and other colonized peoples and allowed us to understand more fully why those cultures did not surrender to the power and material attractions of the intruders.

In shifting so uncompromisingly from total concentration on the Europeans to almost equally exclusive focus on the indigenes, the revisionists have left some questions not only unanswered but unasked. Why were the intruders prepared to sink men and treasure into the suppression of rebellions? Why was the "civilizing mission", the cultural arm of conquest, in practice so tentative, so undermanned and so obsessed with considerations of security?

Just as the Government House (or bush boma) perspective dropped from historiographical sight, a half-formed resolution of the paradoxes was emerging. For want of further probing, it has tended
to harden into an orthodoxy which ran—and still runs—like this: the British (and other European imperial powers) conquered their empires because they were richer, more technologically advanced and more culturally arrogant than the conquered; but the imperialists failed to hold their empires because they were not rich enough, failed to meet the technological and administrative demands of development and lost their faith in their superiority.

The effect of close research on the indigenous peoples under colonial rule has called all these assumptions into question but sup­planted none of them. It now appears that if the British ruled their empire, they did not run it. Local collaborators who manipulated the British “masters”, self-sufficient cultures which rode out the colonial storm, defiant nationalists who took on the intruders at their own game and beat them—all these are now familiar stereotypes from the literature of the new colonial history.

In learning to appreciate the cultures of the ruled, we have begun to depreciate the realities of the colonial situation, especially in the crucial but increasingly ignored period at and soon after the turn of the twentieth century when the “civilizing mission” faced its vital test. Reading back into that era the “trusteeship” dogma of the period between the world wars, we have forgotten the limitations, of vision as well as resources, under which the colonial administrations laboured. With vast new territories to govern in Africa, older ones to consolidate around the globe and assertive white dominions eager to test their new strength against the “mother country”, administrative echelons were grossly overextended. In Britain itself, the pressure on the bureaucracy intensified as laissez-faire precedents succumbed to the emerging regulatory state. Slowly but from absolute necessity, informal empire and amateur administration were superseded by professional bureaucrats and the inward-looking politics of the embryonic welfare state.

At this moment, when the right of the men born to rule was under challenge both in politics and in administration, the rulers faced unprecedented demands on their capacity to survive and to innovate. Their response was to stress survival above visionary novelty; men were needed who could improvise means to hold the empire un­waveringly on course.

Matthew Nathan caught the spirit of this era so successfully that for a time he rose rapidly within the ranks of the administrative services both overseas and in Britain. Still a soldier and an engineer-designer when his more celebrated contemporaries such as Lord Lugard and Lord Milner had been relishing the proconsul’s indepen-
dent role, Nathan brought to his later administrations attributes which initially endeared him to his superiors. Part natural, part cultivated, his reputation for reliability and circumspection grew from a military disposition to seek directives from above but it was matched by an ambition to rise from below which he had acquired as a member of Britain's aspiring Jewish minority.

As long as he remained attuned to his London masters' highest priorities—to keep order and balanced books—Nathan's advancement kept pace with his ambition. Inheriting rebellions against his predecessors' administrations in west Africa, he gained credit for the peace that followed and progressed at an early age to knighthood and the high-ranking governorship of Hong Kong. Pushed aside from there by the even faster rising Lugard, Nathan faced the test of imminent rebellion in Natal and in the process fell from grace with the Colonial Office. Exploiting his real talent as a second-in-command, executing but not making policy, and exploiting, too, newfound and influential friends who included Prime Minister Asquith, he regained the personal security and prestige he coveted during a term in the home civil service. But at Easter 1916 he ran head on into the rebellion he dreaded; the Irish rising put paid to his reputation as a cool head and he ended his long career in the ostensibly calm waters of Queensland. But even in that ceremonial governorship his anachronistic role as a symbol of nineteenth-century empire pursued him, as the Queensland government pushed constitutional precedents to their limit and as Nathan, the amateur administrator, was passed over for the prestigious post of governor of Ceylon in favour of the eminently professional Sir Hugh Clifford.

At its zenith in scale but its nadir in vision in the early twentieth-century, the British empire gave Nathan a creed which he accepted more totally than his inherited Judaism. Having and holding, not the loving and cherishing of the later "trusteeship" code followed by his professional successors, served Nathan and the empire of his day as a rationale of rule. The motto "never ask, never refuse" which Nathan adopted for his coat of arms concealed a careerist's mentality.

Unusual in his religion, the speed of his rise in high office and even in his bachelor status, Nathan was a typical member of his administrative generation in his zeal for conserving the imperial status quo. Until changes in the career structure and objectives of the empire made him into that caricature of anachronism, the retired colonel and "old colonial hand", he was among the last and most esteemed of Britain's "amateur" administrators.
"any special service in the Colonies that may chance to be going"

...with reference to the argument that [Lugard's proposal to allow west African governors to spend half of each year in London] would give us a better class of Governors, it is no doubt true that our choice is limited on account of the dangers (real and supposed) of the climate, but we get very fairly good men as it is (such as Sir F. Lugard himself) and some first-rate men (such as Sir W. Maxwell and Sir M. Nathan)...

(Reginald Antrobus, Colonial Office, January 1906')

The Colonial Office assessment of the respective merits of Frederick Lugard and Matthew Nathan in 1906, when both men had achieved prominence as governors in West Africa, has been borne out neither by the judgment of a later Whitehall generation nor by the historians who have weighed the impact of the two men's personalities on the colonies they governed. Later to become famous as Governor-General of Nigeria, author of a book read almost as holy writ by a generation of British overseas administrators, and as the subject of perhaps the most influential biography in the literature of African colonial studies, Lugard was the doyen among the men who ruled the British empire in the twentieth century. Matthew Nathan, the "first-rate" governor, went on to a career which demonstrated not only his personal limitations but also those of the bureaucratic apparatus responsible for selecting and promoting key officials in an empire which was beginning to outstrip the vision of the generation which had created it.
To the point at which Antrobus made his revealing remark on their capacities, Lugard and Nathan had followed somewhat similar paths to preferment. Both had served as junior military officers in India and Africa and although Lugard—four years older than Nathan—had displayed a certain inclination for freebooting during his exploits in Uganda for the Imperial British East Africa Company, his appointment as the administrator of Northern Nigeria in 1898 resulted from the same shortage of experienced colonial service personnel which prompted the Colonial Office to send Nathan in the following year to act as Governor of Sierra Leone. Antrobus was therefore summing up the temperament and accomplishments of governors whose work he had supervised for a period of seven or eight years when he declared his preference for Nathan. An indication of the reasons for this preference appears in a comment made a few months later by George Fiddes, who had been longer at the Colonial Office than Antrobus, and reflected an ingrained Whitehall dislike of troublesome officials overseas when he wrote to Nathan: “We love Governors who run their Colonies without having awkward questions, and so you are very dear to us”. As long as officials like Fiddes and Antrobus controlled their destinies, governors who demonstrated a caretaker mentality found favour at the Colonial Office and left their mark on the colonies. An outstanding example of a “first-rate” governor, as judged by his masters in London, Nathan followed a career which illuminates the temporizing character of the British empire before Lugard’s gospel of cultural conservation and commercial development came to pervade the administrative air in Whitehall and the colonies.

Born in 1862, almost the fulcrum year of the period which has been labelled “the mid-Victorian balance”, Nathan imbibed that era’s faith in the virtues of Anglo-Saxon decorum and noblesse oblige. But he was neither an Anglo-Saxon nor an aristocrat; the son of a moderately successful business man and a professing Jew, Nathan was excluded by his faith from the great “public” schools in which the Victorian middle-class credo of service and self-restraint was inculcated into the men with whom he later served in England and abroad. Denied by birth and lack of public school ties the influential connections which opened the door to easy promotion in the public and military services, Matthew Nathan was obliged to make his own way in life. That he chose to do so within the conditions set down by a class to which he could not claim automatic entry is the key to his character and the goals he set for himself.

Nathan’s father Jonah was the great-grandson of a Jewish quill
maker who migrated to London from Dessau in Germany in the eighteenth century and established a business which supported two generations of the family. At the time of Matthew Nathan's birth, his father had become a junior partner in the firm of Thomas de la Rue, who was an innovator in the ornamental paper goods field. Twice married, Jonah Nathan profited sufficiently in business to own a comfortable house at 11 Pembridge Square in West London, a fashionable address for a middle-class Jew but one which reflected little social prominence and no political influence. The house, four storeys high and facing a pleasant park, served both as home and school for Jonah Nathan's nine children, a son by his first marriage and six sons and two daughters by his second marriage to Miriam Jacobs.

Twenty-five years younger than her husband, Miriam Nathan firmly discouraged his hopes that one of the boys would follow him into business and arranged their education by private tutors along the lines of that offered in the "public" schools, except that she steered them towards the modern languages which were her own love and away from the study of classics. Her greatest pleasure was in her sons' successes in the competitive examinations for the army and civil services, and in the results she had much cause for pride. Not herself a devout Jew, Miriam Nathan planted in her children an attitude to their faith which was a careful compromise between the duty to avoid total apostasy and the social necessity of playing down their Jewish extraction.

Certainly British Jews of long residence and respectable station found themselves in an ambivalent position in late nineteenth century society. Although in 1858, with his hat on his head and his hand on the Old Testament, Baron Lionel de Rothschild recited a newly amended oath of allegiance and took his seat in the House of Commons as the first professing Jew to be a member of Parliament, this event symbolized the removal of a merely formal disability from his co-religionists. Adjustment on a wider front to the legal reform was slow to follow: for example, not until 1886 did the British army recognize Judaism as a creed for entry on a soldier's official file. Social acceptance, with its corollary of equal opportunity in the professions, had to wait until the twentieth century, when Jewish lawyers, medical practitioners and civil servants became commonplace. Matthew Nathan and his brothers belonged to the generation which made this transition while maintaining at least the externals of their faith, unwilling for reasons they rarely expressed to follow the lead of such families as that of Benjamin Disraeli via
abandonment of Judaism to acceptance by the English middle and even upper classes.

Remaining Jewish in England at the end of the nineteenth century carried a new stigma, nevertheless; the large influx of continental Jews into London’s East End and their entry into small-scale trade reinforced the age-old prejudice against Jews in general, as socially inferior and predatory in their business practices. Organizations such as the Anglo-Jewish Association and the Society of Maccabaeans, to both of which Nathan belonged, made it their object to secure respectability for the established and middle-class Jews from whom they drew their members. While these associations attempted to align themselves with their co-religionists undergoing persecution, whether in eastern Europe or in London’s Whitechapel, the Nathan family’s attitudes demonstrate the extent to which British Jews who had begun to entrench themselves in England resented the new challenge to their station. Miriam Nathan appeared genuinely surprised when Matthew described the German consul in Sierra Leone as “a gentleman”, for she thought that “the German Jews were not particularly famed for that [quality]”; and Nathan himself enquired more than half seriously whether his mother would have her carriage fumigated after it had carried Jewish voters from Whitechapel to the polls in the 1885 election.\(^1\)

No less an authority than Sigmund Freud has charted the pitfalls of lay psychoanalysis by biographers.\(^2\) The temptation is great to attribute Nathan’s ambition and lifelong bachelorhood to the meeting in him of two psychological pressures, for he was not only a member of a social minority anxious to achieve acceptance but he was also, of all her six sons, the apple of Miriam Nathan’s eye.\(^3\) Exceptionally dutiful towards his mother, Nathan wrote to her at least once a week when away from home until her death in 1909, when he was forty-seven and already a senior colonial governor. It is therefore difficult to avoid dismissing him as a “mother’s boy”, even at the height of his success, and equally enticing to describe Miriam Nathan in terms reminiscent of the “Jewish mamma” of fiction, binding her son to her will with hoops of emasculating iron. Freud declared that “...the only thing that brings a mother undiluted satisfaction is her relation to a son.... The mother can transfer on to a son all the ambition which she has had to suppress in herself, and she can hope to get from him the satisfaction of all that has remained to her of her masculinity complex”.\(^4\) This tendency in Miriam Nathan may have been reinforced by the fact that her husband was old enough to be her father and in his last years was so preoccupied with his health.
that she occasionally lost patience with him; certainly she sometimes referred to Jonah Nathan in overtly disparaging terms in letters to Matthew at this stage.\textsuperscript{14} She did not discourage her sons’ belief that their industriousness and ambition were a direct consequence of her training and their efforts, nor did she attempt to soothe Matthew when he complained that his father “...never sends me any special messages but I suppose he has nothing particular to say to me”.\textsuperscript{16}

If Carl Jung may be called in to supplement a tentatively Freudian interpretation of Nathan’s relationship with his parents, it may be added that Jung noted the supplanting in adulthood of a son’s image of his father’s “limited, often all-too-human, personality” by a dedication to the concepts of “the state, law, duty, responsibility and spirit”.\textsuperscript{17} In a generalized sense, which will be qualified as Nathan’s determination to devote himself to service to “the state”, instead of to a settled life as husband and father, is examined, the young Nathan seems to have conformed to this description of a maturing personality in search of an all-absorbing substitute for a father whose example he had decided, with strong encouragement from his mother, not to follow.

Nathan’s commitment to success in competition with his peers was marked from the outset, even among brothers whose zeal in the pursuit of success in the public service was outstanding in the Anglo-Jewish community. Even his younger brother Robert, the only one of the Nathan sons to attend a university, initially suffered from a sense of inferiority in the face of Matthew’s shining examination record.\textsuperscript{18} Entering the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, in 1878 after being placed second in the entrance examination, Matthew Nathan set himself to be first in all the subjects he was required to study, including mathematics, modern languages, English composition and dictation, geometry and geography. He avoided the optional classics course and immersed himself in the Woolwich curriculum, which had been devised to produce Engineers and Artillery subalterns whose social accomplishments would make them acceptable in the middle-class circle to which their commissions would give them automatic entree.\textsuperscript{19} Nathan dutifully attended some of the dining and dancing entertainments which absorbed much of the energies of his fellow cadets but he found them dull and awkward occasions for a late adolescent whose life hitherto had been spent largely in the confines of his family home. After one such evening he wrote in his diary that he had wasted several hours in idle chatter: “I did not enjoy the dance much. I hate dancing”.\textsuperscript{20}

Already a little too earnest for his years, Nathan earned a reputa-
tion as a bookish and over-ambitious student; as one product of Woolwich later put it, industry was "somewhat rare" among the cadets of Nathan's day, and at one stage his colleagues attempted to dampen his ardour for study by burning his notebooks. The attempt failed, for Nathan proceeded to accumulate all the honours Woolwich could offer: he was appointed Senior Under-Officer in his final year, collected most of the prizes for languages and mathematics and graduated first in his class, receiving both the Sword of Honour for exemplary conduct and the Pollock Medal for scholarly proficiency. However, even when he was only eighteen and apparently well started on a promising military career, Nathan's limitations were apparent to a discerning eye, for the Academy governor remarked, at the parade at which Nathan's success was announced, that he had distinguished himself "...not so much by the possession of excellent abilities as by the remarkable power of self-restraint and well-directed application which he has demonstrated throughout his residence".

Commissioned as a subaltern of the Royal Engineers with the most successful Woolwich graduates, Nathan went on in 1880 to the School of Military Engineering, Chatham, for two years of professional training. More vocational than the formal Woolwich curriculum, the Chatham course revealed the first deficiencies in Nathan's aptitude for a career as a practical engineer. The diaries which he kept assiduously from this time, and his regular letters to his mother, contain frequent anxious references to his difficulties in coping with field exercises involving mastery of conventional construction techniques and specialist methods of fortification, railway building and bridging. He enjoyed the outdoor work but confessed to his mother that he was "a great duffer at it". His lack of physical coordination irritated him—his letters refer to his boat being "thrashed" in a race and to his playing football, "badly, as usual"—because he admired sporting prowess in others. But his most revealing remark about this admiration, and his reasons for it, was made when he was in India, the overseas station par excellence in which skill in polo or pig-sticking carried with it a measure of general acclaim: "To be good at a sport cannot do a fellow's work any harm and makes him twice as much thought of by his associates".

Unable to earn a career bonus from expertise on the sporting field or even in field exercises, Nathan had to be content with less hearty plaudits given for excellence at his work, the immediate if mildly envious cries of "Do it with me, Nathan" when Chatham instructors
set the trainees to work in pairs on theoretical projects. Self-doubt crept into Nathan’s letters even when his projects were almost invariably judged the best in the group, for he realized that he was a slow worker, taking two weeks to complete assignments which would be allotted only one day on active service. Balancing this maturing perception of his limitations was a youthful smugness about his judgment of personalities and priorities; he noted with some satisfaction that trouble had followed the appointment as Senior Under-Officer of a cadet against whom he had warned the governor of the Academy, and he greeted the suicide of a former Woolwich rival with the remark: “...I feared he would do no good in the service. He was very weakminded and easily led and I do not think he could ever have received any proper training”.

Despite his later assessment of the Chatham course as “an indifferent training” for a career in engineering, Nathan continued while there to “do good in the service”. He passed the examination for promotion to lieutenant of the Royal Engineers with a special certificate of excellence and the mark of “distinguished” in every subject including those with a practical bias. With this record and the beginnings of a reputation as a prodigy in the field of fortifications theory, the twenty year old “sapper” expected a suitably rewarding first posting and listened with excitement to rumours that he was to be sent either to Egypt or as a junior observer to the German army manoeuvres at Koblenz. He was therefore disappointed, even momentarily angry with the military bureaucracy which now controlled his fate, when these glorious prospects faded and he was assigned instead to the usual humdrum duties of a new Royal Engineer lieutenant, assisting the district engineer at York in the north of England. “I would have preferred a more military station or even London to this”, he confessed in one of the infrequent self-revealing entries in his diary.

By a stroke of luck, duly mixed with the manipulation of useful connections which he was later to abhor when it served the interests of others, Nathan was saved from the obscurity of district work after only three months at York. The Chatham commandant during Nathan’s term was Colonel Andrew Clarke, a former Governor of the Straits Settlements and the son of a Governor of Western Australia, who went on in 1881 to the post of Inspector-General of Fortifications at the War Office in London. A Royal Engineer, Clarke looked to his corps to provide a sound young theoretical engineer able to prepare fortifications schemes for the colonies and chose Nathan. “Even London” was preferable to York, and in
Whitehall Nathan spent thirteen of the next seventeen years. The embryonic Colonial Defence Committee, created in 1878, had lasted only a year but its work was carried on by the War Office until a new C.D.C., with inter-departmental membership, emerged in 1885 under Andrew Clarke's chairmanship and with George Sydenham Clarke, another Royal Engineer, as full-time secretary. The elder Clarke, no relative of G.S. Clarke (who was later elevated to the peerage as Lord Sydenham of Combe), apparently regarded Nathan as his personal protege and, although after a time "Sir Andrew's" interest began "to pall a little", Nathan scrupulously followed his mother's reiterated advice to cultivate this useful connection and often used Clarke's influence to work his way into and out of overseas assignments. In contrast to his irritation about Sir Andrew Clarke's paternalistic manner, Nathan felt a genuine admiration and even affection for George Clarke, fourteen years his elder and, like Nathan, first in his graduating class from Woolwich. Nathan modelled his career so closely on George Clarke that he later followed him as C.D.C. secretary and into the colonial service. In India Nathan assiduously the Clarke gospel on fortifications but carefully avoided a reputation for the excessive zeal in this cause which had held up Clarke's military promotion.

Under the tutelage of the Clarkes, Nathan was able to blend the career advantages of the high visibility with which Whitehall furnished ambitious young officers and the "more military" station abroad for which he yearned. In three West African dry seasons from 1883 to 1887 he designed and supervised preliminary construction of fortifications for the naval coaling station at Freetown, Sierra Leone, in the latter two tours as Commanding Royal Engineer with the temporary rank of captain. With a prescience which could not have been fortuitous, since on several later occasions he managed to avoid some of the drudgery of practical construction work and the worst periods of weather in the tropics, Nathan arranged a secondment to the Sudan expedition in 1884, leaving to a Royal Engineer colleague, who later died as the result of a fever caught in Freetown, the bulk of the battery and barracks building. Nathan's tours in Sierra Leone as an engineer were therefore less notable for the monuments he left on the colony's landscape than for the marks that experience left on his private image of Africa and of Africans.

Still in his early twenties and not yet under the pressure of high office to maintain discretion even in his private opinions, Nathan expressed in his letters home some candid and critical views on Sierra
Leone's inhabitants and government. The European traders he regarded as a "seedy lot", though he added with a patronizing middle-class air that "...one can hardly expect that the elite of society will go out to the west coast for palm-oil and ground-nuts". He considered the white officers of the West Indian Regiment, on garrison duty in Freetown, to be immeasurably inferior to the Royal Engineers of his status but he decided that, for diplomatic and career reasons, it was necessary while on duty overseas "...to be nice to nasty people". By far the nastiest in his judgment were the Creoles, descendants of emancipated and repatriated slaves, whose sole objective was to "defraud and insult their white masters". In his letters he reserved for the Creoles the disparaging term "nigger", placing their value as men and as British subjects well below the "natives" such as his Temne hammock bearers, whose "obedient and respectful" behaviour persuaded him to join in the then prevalent consensus among west African expatriates that the "bush" natives "...though less civilized are a much better class of being" than the Creoles. Though in moments of dispassionate appraisal of the Creoles he could describe as "natural" their hatred of white foreigners "who came to [Sierra Leone] to make money out of it and them", he was shocked when he learned that a trusted foreman had stolen money and goods from the Engineers' stores. On the advice of old west African hands in the colonial service, he suppressed his conscientious revulsion against this embezzlement and decided to turn a blind eye to it: "I am told that this style of arrangement is very usual in the colony and I shall do well to submit to it. I suppose I shall have to do so but it makes me angry".

His acquaintance with the colony's men of affairs left him equally disillusioned; he described the Governor, Sir Samuel Rowe, as "the old brute at the head of government who overworks and generally ill-treats his staff" and the influential Creole lawyer and member of the Legislative Council, Sir Samuel Lewis, as "a miserable native lawyer". Lewis raised Nathan's ire by pressing compensation claims for clients who owned the land which was required for fortifications sites. The resulting imbroglio involved Nathan in drafting a special ordinance for resumption of the land and attendance at a heated Legislative Council session where it was pushed through by the official majority. From this experience he concluded he had been offered "an insight into the misgovernment of a brown colony" which he was later to govern at a particularly troubled time in its history. In view of this return to the natives, it is worth noting Nathan's description in 1885 of an educated "middle class nigger" of
the type he would have to work with fifteen years later: "He will be as big a ruffian as he can without breaking the law, he will go a great deal to church, talk violently of the wrongs of the blacks and spend his spare time in trying to prove that they are not the descendants of the cursed sons of Noah"."

Before this descendant of Noah's more favoured sons returned to govern Freetown's Creoles, he had two further opportunities to extend his experience of the world outside the sheltered confines of Victorian England. First in Egypt and then in India Nathan served as a military officer on the fringe of ancient cultures owing nothing to the Anglo-Saxon virtues which he cherished. Anxious for activity within the sound of gunfire and within reach of the medal so coveted by young British officers before the harsh realities of the Boer War dimmed their ardour, Nathan arranged a secondment from the War Office to the Sudan expedition, under General Wolseley, which in 1884 was inching its way up the Nile to rescue Charles Gordon from his beleaguered position in Khartoum. Nathan hoped at least for work on the military railway to be built around the Nile cataracts and at best for a posting to the front as a staff officer and fortifications consultant. But, as earlier at York and later in India, he was at first thwarted by superiors who chose to put him on routine duties; he was sent to Ramleh, a small and inexpressibly dull little town near Alexandria, to renovate barracks and, as he put it bitterly, to "shovel drains".

Uncharacteristically Nathan first suspected that his Jewish background was the reason for this discrimination, writing bitterly to his mother of his commanding officer as "a Pharaoh that knew not Joseph", but he resolved to work hard at his drains, to learn Arabic and to "sit tight". This resolution soon wavered in the face of Ramleh's tedium and he committed the first overt breach of the motto he later adopted (nec rogitando nec regando, never ask and never refuse) when he reached for the one string within his grasp which led back to the War Office and the helpful Clarkes. But reaction was slow and he pined away on district work for five months, almost half of his tour in Egypt, until he was reprieved. Meanwhile he remarked enviously on the rapid military promotion of Spencer Childers, son of the Chancellor of the Exchequer: "...the service is an excellent thing for those who can use it". Even when the Clarkes' intervention extricated him from Ramleh, Nathan was at first only assigned to the exacting but unexciting task of survey work near Cairo until a telegram arrived from General Sir Redvers Buller ordering "Lieutenant Nathan, who seems to know everything" up
the Nile. The omniscient young engineer noted in his diary with barely suppressed delight: "This is getting very ludicrous. I do not know where this absurd estimate of my abilities arises from".40

Nathan’s pleasure was short-lived; Buller in fact wanted a submarine miner to blast rocks from the cataracts and Nathan had only a theoretical knowledge of this special field. He was sent instead to build a section of the railway around the second cataract above Wadi Halfa, still far from the front and nine miles from the nearest English-speaking officer. Though disappointed, he consoled himself with the belief that the railway was the "most useful work for an R.E. in Egypt" and settled to his task of supervising gangs of labourers for five lonely months. He found to his relief that he was capable of satisfactory work in this aspect of military engineering, taking a proprietary pride in his "little bit of the line", but he had no intention of remaining in Egypt indefinitely. With his mother’s prompting, he resumed his correspondence with Sir Andrew Clarke and enclosed with one of these letters a carefully compiled account of the Sudan military railway, admitting privately to his mother that its publication might "...bring some credit on the officers engaged".41 With his own assignment completed, Nathan greeted with a fervent "Hurrah!" his orders to return to London and hastened back to the now enticing prospect of his desk in Whitehall.

As a serving military officer, Nathan had only one other overseas tour apart from his intermittent excursions to Freetown, and again the opportunity came at a providential moment in his career. After Sir Andrew Clarke retired as Inspector-General of Fortifications in 1886, Nathan found himself responsible directly to the new Deputy I.G.F., Colonel Arthur Durnford, a descendant of a long line of Royal Engineers but in Nathan’s view a man incompetent to manage the increasingly complex and controversial business of the Colonial Defence Committee. With George Clarke firmly entrenched as the Committee’s secretary, too senior and too solicitous for Nathan to entertain any private designs on his post, the possibility loomed of a lengthy and limiting tour of duty in London which Nathan was anxious to avoid. He decided that "...a tour in India will, I am sure, be better for me than another spell at the W.O."—better, too, than another spell in Sierra Leone completing the fortifications he had designed. Skilfully manipulating his strategic position on the C.D.C., which brought him into contact with representatives of other bureaucratic bodies in Whitehall, he arranged for himself a posting to India as a coastal fortifications specialist under a special covenant which limited his tour to three, instead of the normal five, years and
which guaranteed him a higher rate of pay than that usually given to Indian Army officers of equivalent rank.

Thus cushioned (as he thought) against the danger of being buried in the obscurity of an Indian garrison, he sailed happily for Bombay in 1887, only to find on arrival that the special work on coastal battery design for which he had "volunteered" was almost completed. This revelation put him "in a temper all day" and the tantrum grew chronic when he was put to work on preparing a report intended by the Indian military authorities to upset a recommendation of the C.D.C. He feared an embarrassing exposure between two fires, damaging not only his standing with the C.D.C. but the reputation as an expert which had preceded him, for the investigation involved the examination of disputed claims for land needed for coastal fortifications. He wrote miserably to his mother: "...the detailed instructions I have received...make the work I shall have to do...look too much like that over which I came to grief at Sierra Leone. A sort of secret enquiry with a view to upsetting a C.D.C. proposal does not strike me as glorious work". It was essential that, no matter whom he offended in India, he act at once to extricate himself from this potentially dangerous assignment. He proceeded to draw up a lengthy report critical of the local defence committee's plans and with it he sent to his superior in the Indian Military Works Department a private note which he paraphrased at length in an anxious letter to his mother:

I told him that I would work my hardest and best at anything that was interesting but that they could not expect me to be keen on assisting a drunken subordinate to look after a contractor's work, that I should rather have interesting work than excessive pay and routine. In fact you see that I am making myself thoroughly disagreeable but, remembering the drains of Ramleh, I do not intend to accept quietly the position of Assistant Engineer to carry out other people's designs, especially as I think I know more about coast defences than anyone else in India. I shall probably be snubbed but that is better than neglect.

At the age of twenty-five and a mere lieutenant, Nathan probably deserved to be snubbed for his vanity and his refusal to follow orders, however uncongenial. In fact—and this time without the help of his War Office patrons—his petulance was rewarded with release from Bombay, which he regarded as "too European ... not my idea of an Indian station". He was given what was in effect a roving commission to inspect, and in stations where he could prove the need, to design and build coastal defences in India and Burma. This was indeed "interesting work", not only because of the initiative he could
display in it but because it allowed him to travel widely with carefully
timed spells in the coolness of the Simla hill station to prepare
designs when the plains were too hot for comfort. But, as in Sierra
Leone, he was least at ease when he was engaged in construction
work; while in Rangoon, and plagued by the “indolence” of Burmese
labourers and the machinations of a Greek contractor, he concluded:
“I never wish for a more unpleasant task”.

Nevertheless, Nathan’s three years in India were happy ones, for
they had the effect of advancing his career as an engineer while offering
him enough leisure to form distinctive opinions about people, his
faith and the empire. As on Lugard and on many others who later
served as administrators in Africa, India left on Nathan the perma-
rent impress of a pride in the imperial mission and confidence in the
natural justice which had made the British rulers. When his younger
brother Robert was appointed to the Indian Civil Service, Nathan
rehearsed, in a letter to his mother which was intended also for his
brother’s eyes, the conventional arguments for and against the right
of “educated natives” to participate in their own government. In the
conclusion of this letter, Nathan aligned himself unreservedly with
the “ruin of the country” school of thought on this question. He
considered the Burmese equally unpromising material for responsible
positions, but “a great improvement on the Hindus—they [the
Burmese] are inherently lazy but they are not servile, are good
humoured and reputed plucky”. On another plane, this was the
same distinction which Nathan, and many others with his
background in Victorian England, drew between the upstart proto-
nationalists in the British empire and the more admirable, if not
precisely noble, savages who submitted to their white masters.

Clearly influenced by the insular and undistilled racism of expat-
atriate society in the European clubs and salons of India, Nathan’s
views were nevertheless slightly idiosyncratic at a time when domina-
tion of the lesser breeds was the keynote of policy and of private
behaviour in the British dependencies, for he not only recognized the
depths of hostility from which Indian and Creole “insolence” sprang
but also developed, albeit in a half-baked version, a paternalistic at-
titude towards non-white peoples which survived even the strongest
test of his convictions in the Gold Coast, Natal and Ireland, where
British rule and his own ambition were to be threatened by rebellion.
The impression of British might and magnanimity which he formed
as a junior officer on the fringe of the “heaven-born” circle of Indian
Civil Service officials at Simla and other major administrative
centres such as Calcutta and Rangoon reinforced his zeal to play a
role in this great mission in places as unlike India as Accra, Pietermaritzburg and Dublin.

India marked another significant phase in Nathan's personal development, through—as in the formation of his views on the empire and the part he was to perform in conserving it—there is no single moment at which he articulated an unequivocal opinion on it. The social whirl of the Simla “season” and the paler imitations in other stations were notorious marriage markets, at which eligible bachelors were wooed decorously by unmarried daughters of I.C.S. and army officials, and more vigorously by questing mothers. Though he enjoyed the hospitality available to officers like himself who went to India unattached, he looked upon the constant dinner parties and dances as simply diversions after “long days with pencil and pen”. They were long days: even in Simla, where the most dedicated officials might find in dalliance a distraction from their work at the height of the season, Nathan steadfastly put in ten hours a day, six days a week, on his designs, commenting rather smugly that he thought this “a fair return for the pay I get”.48

Except for an oblique reference to “a young romance of mine” while he was a Woolwich cadet, there is no comment in his papers, until he reached the age of fifty, on any serious involvement, or even temporary entanglement, with a woman. He commented freely on his brothers’ choice of wives as each married, generally seeming to think that commitment to a family was laudable and natural but not to be emulated by him. His mother gradually dropped from her letters the little interrogations which had followed any mention by him of personable young ladies he met overseas, simply expressing her “amusement” at his careful arrangement of seating plans for mixed dinners given by his “chummery” of young officers at Simla, where he invariably placed himself between the two oldest and most eminently unmarriageable ladies present. Nor was there any attachment to male acquaintances; far from needing to sublimate any homosexual tendency which might have developed from his superficially Oedipan relationship with his mother, he apparently made no bosom friends among the predominantly masculine and military circle in which he moved in his early years and, insofar as he made a “hero” of George Clarke, seemed to subordinate personal admiration to emulation of the public figure which Clarke cut. Commitment to any intimate and demanding relationship was not in his character, or in his career plans. In Sierra Leone he described as “a very sad thing” the engagement of a West Indian Regiment Officer to the daughter of the regimental quartermaster, an officer who had
worked his way up from the rank of private; the girl was “fairly
good-looking” but “rather below than above [her fiance’s] class in
point of breeding” and he joined in pitying the “unfortunate
victim”. When he left India, on the verge of thirty, Nathan was
already a confirmed bachelor, charming and courtly in his manner
towards women but determined not to sacrifice his career and social
standing, like the Sierra Leone “victim”, on the alter of convention
and sexual gratification.

Although in later life this self-possessed careerist seems to have
succumbed for a time to the drives which he mastered in his youth, he
was capable of close friendships with women who shared his high es­
timation of personal independence. One such relationship, with Mary
Kingsley the celebrated explorer and west African publicist,
foundered on Nathan’s cold rejection of her growing desire for more
than mere friendship, but with another equally successful and
prominent female friend who accepted his conditions, he established
a long and thoroughly platonic association which demonstrated his
need for the admiration of a woman who was in his terms a “lady”
but not a potential wife. Mary Cholmondeley, a successful novelist
and like Mary Kingsley a spinster member of a family with a clerical
background in the Anglican Church, was thirty-eight (and three
years older than Nathan) when she met him at a London dinner party
in 1897. At soirees in her London flat, also attended by Henry James
and other aspirants to literary fame, and privately in her Suffolk cot­
tage Mary Cholmondeley regularly entertained Nathan whenever he
was in England over a period of twenty-eight years and they cor­
responded when he was abroad. In the characteristically conver­
sational style of her published writings, Mary Cholmondeley showed
how completely she accepted Nathan’s estimation of their
relationship when she wrote him a farewell letter as he left for Hong
Kong in 1904:

... this is a large gulf of three years that you will be away. I should like to
bridge it by writing more regularly than I have done so far—giving our
friendship, as it were, a little rub up now and then. You quite understand
that I will do the rubbing up by myself. You need not interfere. That is
my department. Yours is China. You grasp the fact that you are not to
answer—at least only very seldom and that very shortly. That is part of
the compact.

Mary Cholmondeley understood equally well Nathan’s fear of
ridicule which occasionally surfaced when his photograph was
published in the public press. This fear, which might reflect a self­
consciousness about his Semitic appearance and certainly revealed a
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

profound uncertainty about the image of dependability and self-
possession he tried so hard to project, surfaced when he was Gover-
nor of the Gold Coast and fiercely rebuked the journalist E.D. Morel
for printing his portrait without permission in the Liverpool-based
publication *West Africa*. Nathan also reprimanded Mary
Cholmondeley, no doubt in milder terms, when he recognized ele-
ments of his own appearance and behaviour in the rather un-
imaginative figure of “Uncle Tom” in her short story “St. Luke’s
Summer”. Though she must have been privately amused by this
reaction, since in the preface to the volume in which the story ap-
peared she had gone to considerable lengths to deny any intention of
caricaturing in her works “a stranger, or, worse still, an acquain-
tance, or, immeasurably worst of all, a friend”, she soothed Nathan
by pointing out that “Uncle Tom” was a man “who had his good
points—he was a wag out of (post) office hours, and had a gallant
manner to ‘the ladies’. I think he is rather nice myself, but that may
be because he reminds me of a revered friend”.

The stodgy figure of “Uncle Tom” which Mary Cholmondeley
saw in Nathan as a senior public servant had not fully emerged while
he was still relatively fancy-free in India. Anxious to acquire the ac-
tive service medal which had eluded him in Egypt, as a token not only
of career success but also of a dash and spirit of adventure which he
had not yet ceased to envy in others, Nathan arranged a brief episode
as a member of the Lushai expedition on the north-east frontier.
Brigadier-General W.L. Auchinleck, in command of reinforcements
for the original expeditionary force which had lost many officers to
the virulent malarial fever of the frontier, appointed Nathan as a
junior staff officer to carry out a survey of roads between the isolated
forts in the difficult country occupied by the Chin and Lushai tribes,
reputed to be head-hunters and engaged in the 1880s on sporadic
raids against the flimsy stockades of the frontier garrisons. Nathan
thought the punitive raids carried out by Auchinleck’s force, which
burned villages and took hostages, “a poor sort of warfare” and ad-
mitted that his own brief tour of little more than two weeks was a
time of “delightful laziness”, during which he wrote his report and
remained safely within the bounds of the headquarters camp.

Nevertheless, this rather inactive “active service” had the desired
effect of keeping him “in the authorities’ good books”, as he put it,
and he had his Lushai medal and clasp to relieve the otherwise un-
derorated expanse of his tunic. Experience of hostilities, however
one-sided and unexciting, seems to have confirmed Nathan’s suspi-
cian that his best prospects lay in service far from the sound of shots fired in anger, for, before his Indian tour was over, he was beginning to map out a course which would return him to the kind of administrative work for which he was temperamentally suited: "... I want to stop [in London] about a year and then shall try and get any special service in the Colonies that may chance to be going".  

Nathan's friendships with Mary Cholmondeley and innumerable other men and women from a variety of backgrounds and vocations forbid any attempt to depict him as a lonely and self-sufficient figure, but there was in his nature a pining after solitude which suggests an introspection and a need for self-evaluation at odds with the generally laconic tone of his letters and diaries. As later in life he went off, usually alone, on frequent holidays to Florence ("the most delightful town I have known") and once on a walking tour from London to Somerset, so he returned in 1891 to England from India across the vast stretches of Persia and the Crimea, on horseback and without an escort, taking characteristically copious notes on the landscape, battle fields and architecture of the region which later served as a reservoir for the countless occasions on which, as a governor, he was called upon to offer "a few remarks" at bazaars, school speech days and the unveiling of monuments. From his visit to Constantinople he developed a layman's passion for Byzantine history and later delivered an address on the subject in Natal which, in the perhaps prejudiced view of a fellow Jew in the audience, outshone another on the same programme by the eminent historian, H.A.L. Fisher.

Nathan's preoccupation with a past which was remote from that of his cultural progenitors emerged in his exhaustive notes on the history of every country he visited and the chronological lists he compiled for the colonies which he governed. As a member of a minority, he appears to have needed a sense of his own secure place in the stream of British history, as is plain in his dedicated application in later years to the preservation of county records and his writing of a local history of the Somerset village to which he retired as parvenu lord of the manor. The Annals of West Coker was Nathan's final bid to confirm his status as a respectable Englishman, in spirit if not by descent.

The first indication of Nathan's groping towards an escape from the handicap of his birth appeared while he was in India. There he occasionally attended evening services at Anglican cathedrals, explaining to his mother that he found "the singing good and the preachers as a rule stirring". He began to correspond with Dudley Mills, a Royal Engineer and member of a solid Anglican family,
about his "spiritual doubts and difficulties", and, while these letters have not survived, the self-examination they must have involved is reflected in half-apologetic references to them in others to his mother, where he declined to discuss his uncertainties: "... I do not think it would interest you much if I were to attempt to describe the process or the result". But he became sufficiently versed in the Anglican liturgy, and remained sufficiently determined not to desert the Jewish faith, to correct Mills on a point of doctrine, for when Mills asked him to be godfather to his son in 1898, Nathan pointed out that he would be required to recite the phrase "All this I steadfastly believe ...", at which revelation Mills apologetically withdrew his invitation.

By the time he returned from India, Nathan had decided to continue as at least a nominal Jew, having agreed to pay half the price of purchasing a seat at the New West End Synagogue, his mother contributing the rest of the fee. But his membership was to be a formality, as he clearly indicated to his mother when he wrote that he would accept any seat she chose for him and added that "... if one did wish to use it, it is more pleasant to sit where we did than among the stuffy old gentlemen with exuberant shirt frills who sit behind the desk".

The desk behind which Nathan sat during most of the decade of the eighteen-eighties was closer to another sanctum sanctorum, in the War Office in London. Initially put to work on further fortifications designs for the colonies under the direction of George Clarke, he was once again on the fringes of increasingly heated debates over the distribution and control of expenditure on colonial defence. Behind Clarke's forceful lead, the C.D.C. had acquired a notoriety for exceeding its terms of reference in its dealings with other departments, notably the Colonial Office and the Treasury, and for pressing its own ideas against the advice of colonial garrison commanders. This assertiveness emanated from the Committee's executive, for its chairman, secretary and all the ancillary staff, including Nathan, were Royal Engineers officers, who shared an esprit de corps which irritated the other naval and army members of the committee as much as it offended the civil servants who represented the Treasury and the Colonial Office. Nathan once admitted that the Royal Engineers were infamous for their "combativeness" and confessed that "they all think themselves so immensely superior—including myself". The Royal Engineers who served as C.D.C. secretaries from Clarke's time (1885—1892) to the eventual absorption of the committee into the larger Committee of Imperial Defence
after 1902 were therefore more prominent in the War Office hierarchy than their relatively junior rank warranted; though one of them was a lieutenant colonel, the position was generally held by a captain. Consequently, when Nathan became C.D.C. secretary in 1895, at the age of thirty-three and as a captain of six years' standing, he put his foot on a career ladder which could lead either to rapid advancement, in the army or in related services, or to embroilment in damaging controversy.

That the upshot for Nathan would be a serious setback to his prospects seemed inevitable, for his appointment coincided with two far more significant events which put the C.D.C.'s future under a cloud. The Duke of Cambridge, long a symbol of obsolete military methods as Commander-in-Chief, at last retired; and the Salisbury government took office with Arthur Balfour as First Lord of the Treasury anxious to promote War Office reform. The creation in 1895 of a cabinet Defence Committee reduced the C.D.C. to its original function as merely an information-processing body; as long as the cabinet committee "existed—it would be a gross exaggeration to say that it functioned", the C.D.C. could be no more than "a super filing-cabinet for colonial projects". Nathan was bogged down in the endless preparation of *precis* of defence plans and of the critiques which flowed in from the colonies. He acted under the indecisive direction of Sir Robert Grant, an Inspector-General of Fortifications who lacked George Clarke's zest for inter-office politics and was in any case outgunned by the Defence Committee's ministerial members.

Nathan was the man for the hour; his preference for digesting and dissecting the views of others, rather than for initiating action and pursuing his convictions, the quality which later made him a much-lauded governor in the consolidation period, allowed him to ride out the years of the C.D.C.'s eclipse unscarred by controversy and unembittered by a sense of labouring in a lost cause. In the process his prose style, never vivid or subjective, foundered forever under the weight of some 350 reports and the minutes of frequent but inconclusive C.D.C. meetings. One C.D.C. memorandum reveals in Nathan's restrained language the committee's suspicion that, if the British cabinet had failed to take over the vigorous direction of colonial defence policy, it was nevertheless falling into other, and more eager, hands, for the report records the many occasions on which proposals emanating from London had been rejected in the colonies "for reasons of local policy or expediency". The secretary who signed this veiled complaint against colonial obstructiveness
was later, as governor of Hong Kong, to conduct a lengthy and heated dispute with the C.D.C.'s successor, the Committee of Imperial Defence, over its proposal, which he regarded as parsimonious and potentially dangerous, to reduce the colony's garrison in the interests of economy and in order to reflect the shift in the eastern balance of power after the Japanese destruction of the Russian fleet in the China Sea.

But Nathan displayed no similar assertiveness while he was at the War Office. His fears then were for his own future, not for the safety of the colonies. Anticipating its demise, the C.D.C. resolved in 1899 to make explicit its practice of limiting the secretary's term to no more than five years. Within a year, Nathan had to find a position of equivalent seniority or face the prospect of another Ramleh, another Bombay or, still worse, another York. The experience of George Clarke was not encouraging; after his term as C.D.C. secretary he had been sent off to serve as superintendent of the Royal Carriage Department at Woolwich Arsenal. From this eminently unsuitable position he was rescued after seven years, during which he earned some credit for also serving on War Office reform commissions, by the Colonial Office, which appointed him in 1901 as Governor of Victoria, by then a state within the newly federated Australian Commonwealth and offering little scope for his gifts.

Nevertheless, the connections at the Colonial Office which eventually helped Clarke were available to his successors; in addition to Clarke, three secretaries of the C.D.C. and the C.I.D. later became colonial governors as a result of Colonial Office patronage. Perhaps at Nathan's instigation, since he was later at pains to avoid the appearance of unseemly ambition, the belief gained acceptance in his circle that Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Salisbury government, personally plucked Nathan from the War Office to send him to Sierra Leone as acting governor in 1899. In fact Nathan's acquaintance with Chamberlain was slight in the extreme. The Secretary of State only once consulted Nathan personally on a defence question, although in 1898 Chamberlain recommended him in routine fashion for the award of a Companionship in the Order of St. Michael and St. George (C.M.G.), which was specifically reserved for services to or in the colonies.

It was not the general practice, even in the last years of the Victorian "patronage" system of filling senior colonial appointments, for Secretaries of State for the Colonies personally to select governors, however well they knew potential appointees or wished to pay
off political debts. More useful was the pull a hopeful, or desperate, aspirant might have with the permanent Colonial Office staff, who short-listed the names of applicants for positions ranging from the most junior customs collector or assistant district officer to the prized posts as colonial secretary or governor. On the periphery of Colonial Office activities, Nathan was familiar with the patronage system and decided late in 1898, on the advice of Sir Robert Grant, to make the attempt to "... go into the administrative line of the Colonial Service". He duly presented himself to Chamberlain's private secretary and took the added precaution of approaching Montagu Ommanney, a former Royal Engineer who had made the transition to the Colonial Office staff after serving as private secretary to the Earl of Carnarvon (a former Secretary of State) and as Crown Agent for the colonies in London.\(^2\)

Nathan's expectations were probably no rosier than a short-term appointment as a governor's private secretary or, at best, as a colonial secretary, the senior administrative officer in a colony below the governor. Only recently promoted to major and just short of his thirty-seventh birthday, he was in age and status well behind other military officers who had previously entered the colonial service "at the top" as governors. Nor had a professing Jew ever governed a colony, not only because of the Jews' social disabilities in Britain but because a governor, as the personal representative of the monarch, was the nominal head in a colony of the Church of England. More important still than these handicaps was another which neither he nor the Colonial Office fully recognized. Always slow to imitate the reforms in recruitment (by competitive examination) and promotion (more or less by merit) which other British administrative and military services adopted in the nineteenth century, the Colonial Office had nevertheless begun the piecemeal process of professionalizing its overseas service by opening the highest positions, including that of governor, to "insiders", officials who had begun in the colonies at the lower levels of district officer, colonial secretary or private secretary to a governor. Nathan was by 1899 no longer an "outsider" in the usual sense of that term in Victorian England. Twenty successful years as "an officer and a gentleman" bearing the Queen's Commission had brought him many of the badges of social acceptance—the award of the C.M.G., membership of the exclusive Athenaeum club, invitations to the homes of solid, if not yet eminent members of the establishment—which would not easily have come his way if he had followed his father into commerce, so retaining the stigma of buying his respectability. But the same military career
which had allowed him to advance to a worthy professional status was already a disadvantage in the competition for colonial governorships.

Only ten of the forty-two governors in office in 1899 were former military officers, whereas half of those who had served between 1830 and 1880 had begun in the army or navy. Although more than half of those who governed colonies in the earlier period had risen from a lower rank in the colonial service, by 1899 the proportion was above three quarters. "Starting at the top", as a governor, was becoming rare at the end of the century; while six of the ten governors of dominions and colonies with responsible government were in this category, only three of the thirty-two in Crown colonies had begun their colonial service careers at the level of a governorship. The professionalizing process continued in the twentieth century, though the extent to which it can be attributed to the efforts of one man, Ralph Furse, may be exaggerated. When the name of Major Matthew Nathan went into the hat at the end of 1898, the chance was one-in-four that his military background would earn him a governorship, and one-in-ten that he would be appointed to a Crown colony with a considerable measure of personal authority.

The odds for a Royal Engineer were somewhat more favourable. Since Sir Archibald Campbell, R.E., blazed the trail in 1782 by accepting the appointment of Governor-in-chief of Jamaica, members of this corps had been well represented among soldier governors. By the time Furse, himself a junior army officer and a patronage appointee, arrived at the Colonial Office and began his campaign of recruiting young and specifically trained personnel who might in time rise to the rank of governor, some sixty Royal Engineers had governed at least one colony and many others had found similar openings under the India and Foreign Offices. Not least among the reasons for the relatively footloose careers of Royal Engineers was their awareness of the army's tendency to reserve its highest honours for members of other corps, notably the infantry and artillery. To supplement their willingness to transfer to other services, the R.E.'s possessed more familiarity than most other army officers with the practical management of budgets and supervision of civilians, and they frequently found opportunities to use their expertise in the colonies as directors of public works, railway managers, colonial secretaries or chief customs collectors. For the Colonial Office in particular, faced at the turn of the twentieth century by a sudden need for experienced personnel in the recently acquired African and eastern colonies, the known administrative capacity of a Royal
Engineer who was not only under their noses in Whitehall but had demonstrated his willingness, officer's cap metaphorically in hand, to enter the colonial service, was presumably enough to counterbalance the growing prejudice against made-over military men as governors.

Nathan's chance came to him unexpectedly as a result of one of those accidents of fate which were too common in the "pacification" phase of British colonial government in Africa to appear entirely fortuitous in retrospect. In 1898 a rebellion, one of several against the fragile military and bureaucratic structures improvised to meet the demands of governing hastily annexed African territories, broke out in the Sierra Leone Protectorate. Opinion in Britain about the causes of this uprising in the thinly administered hinterland behind Freetown was divided between those, especially the vocal Liverpool merchants trading on the west coast, who blamed the Governor, Sir Frederic Cardew, and the supporters of the Unionist government, who attributed the trouble to barbarous chiefs bent on resisting beneficial British rule. With the concurrence, if not the unqualified support, of Joseph Chamberlain as the Unionist Secretary of State for the Colonies, Cardew applied and vigorously collected a direct tax, known as the "hut tax", in the Protectorate, though neither he nor his predecessors had succeeded in imposing such a levy on the adamantly opposed Creoles of Freetown. The rebellion led to a well-organized outcry against the tax in Britain, greatly aided by the personal reputation and eloquent pen of Mary Kingsley, a supporter of the Liverpool traders and a convinced opponent of direct taxation in west Africa, which she regarded as a region where such an impost amounted to confiscation of property from natives unfamiliar with a fixed and regularly recurring tribute to their rulers, whether black or white.

Chamberlain first responded to the campaign of criticism by sending out a special commissioner, Sir David Chalmers, to investigate the causes of the rebellion and the wisdom of retaining the tax, and then recalled Cardew to answer the charges against him in Chalmers' report. With Cardew's fate in the balance, the governorship of the Sierra Leone Colony and Protectorate was technically, if temporarily, vacant and Reginald Antrobus, the Colonial Office specialist on west African affairs, had no confidence in the capacity of Colonel J.C. Gore, who as colonial secretary would have administered the territory during the Governor's absence in more settled circumstances. A locum tenens was needed who shared neither Cardew's penchant for independent action nor Gore's supine
and inefficient approach to his job; Nathan, Antrobus considered, was such a man and he had already asked him to hold himself ready to sail for Freetown before Nathan's name was put before Chamberlain.

Unlike his counterpart in The Times, Nathan's military obituarist saw in the Colonial Office's choice of Nathan a clear indication that he had actively sought the Sierra Leone opening. Neither in the Colonial Office records nor in Nathan's personal papers is there any affirmation of this. At this turning point in his career, Nathan followed his motto, "Never ask, never refuse", at least to the extent of not pressing his claims as Cardew's temporary heir. His Sierra Leone experience was well known to the Colonial Office, as were his subsequent activities on and imminent departure from the Colonial Defence Committee. His discretion and his faithful adherence to directives issued by his superiors on the Committee clearly marked him out as fitting the criteria laid down by Antrobus. Ambitious but not self-assertive, Nathan was of the right stamp to become a model middle-rank administrator, "very dear" to a Colonial Office whose need was for governors who would not, as Cardew had, raise "awkward questions".

There were two remaining obstacles in Nathan's path as he took ship for Freetown. At thirty-seven he was exceptionally young to be a serious candidate for a substantive governorship and no professing Jew had preceded him in the career he hoped to follow. Except by cultivating a reputation for premature solemnity and worldly wisdom, there was little Nathan could do to counter any belief that he was not yet of sufficiently mature years to fill the role of governor, but, even before he left for Sierra Leone, he began in an oblique fashion to dissociate himself from public identification with Anglo-Jewry. Never zealous in the practice of his inherited faith but unwilling to desert it completely for the imperial credo which was emerging as his private raison d'être, he apparently concluded that, at least while his future was uncertain, he should remain aloof from any attempts by Jews, in England or in Sierra Leone, to claim him as one of their own. This decision is implicit in his refusal of an invitation in March, 1899, from the Maccabaean Society, an association which promoted social and sporting activities among British Jews, to attend the Society's annual dinner in London as guest of honour. In his carefully drafted reply, Nathan took the line that his modest accomplishments could not be described as having conferred "any benefits on English Jews" and he declined any reward "for services as yet to be performed".

28
From 1899, Nathan began a new career which allowed him to become, in the estimation of his masters and the social circle in which he moved, the solid English gentleman and good public servant he fervently wished to be. In the process, he emerged as a striking example, as near an archetype as any but a fictitious character could be, of the “first-rate” administrator whom the Colonial Office and its home service counterparts might applaud, and reward, in the consolidation phase of the British empire after the turn of the twentieth century. It would be pure fiction to attribute to the breed of functionaries which Nathan typified all the errors and inadequacies of British imperial rule in that period, for only at the level of minutiae, and even there in the light of policies dictated from the centre, did men of Nathan’s character display any genuine initiative. The significance of his career lies rather in the insights it offers into the mentality of the middle-range administrator, poised between Whitehall and the local level, constantly reminded from London that the Colonial and Irish Offices did not intend to “govern from Downing Street”, and torn between the tradition of independence established in the proconsul phase of British expansion in the nineteenth century and the still incompletely stated intention of rationalizing (and, in the pragmatic British manner, of unifying) colonial administration.

Emphasis on aberrant cases like that of Lugard in Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, of Sir Charles Eliot in British East Africa, has left the impression that the proconsul tradition survived and flourished among colonial governors in the face of an indecisive Colonial Office lead. The “man-on-the-spot” thesis illuminating the role of local initiative in the early expansionist phase of the “new” empire has been extended de facto to the period of consolidation and beyond, passing from the proconsul to the bush administrator the mantle of “men who ruled the empire”. When the behaviour of governors in the twentieth century has caught the historian’s eye, it has normally been because of their willingness to ignore Whitehall’s vacillations. But defence of the status quo which Nathan cherished and made it his primary objective to pursue was also the spirit of the empire in its consolidation phase, when vast new territories and populations were brought under active, if rarely effective, British rule. The accuracy with which Nathan reflected that spirit and the constancy with which he refrained from proposing expensive and potentially disruptive innovations, made him for a time the Colonial Office’s golden boy. Instinctively shying away from employing the “iron hand in the velvet glove” which Chamberlain considered a governor’s last weapon,
Nathan followed the less stirring formula for the "best governors" drawn up in 1898 by one of Chamberlain's senior advisers:

... [they] have almost universally been those who, without being exceptionally brilliant in any one respect, have combined fair administrative ability with some common sense, tact, decision, knowledge of the world and of 'men and things', and, above all, the power of exercising personal influence.

Displaying in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Hong Kong the qualities the Colonial Office admired when it gave him his chance in 1899, Nathan was sent in 1907 to govern Natal, a colony for which Lugard's "rather quick temper" was thought to make him unfit. It was a personal irony for Nathan and, more significantly, a striking illustration of the changes which a decade had wrought in Whitehall's vision of the empire, that, while Lugard supplanted Nathan in Hong Kong and went on to distinction in Nigeria, the governor judged to be his superior in 1906 confronted in Natal a challenge to his powers which he could not meet. By the nineteen-twenties, when Lugard's reputation was at its zenith, Nathan was so far reduced in the Colonial Office's favour that he was considered suitable only for the ceremonial duties of Governor of Queensland and the pensioned-off obscurity of his manor house in rural Somerset.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

5. See the article on de la Rue in Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 1885-1890), V, 763. At the death of de la Rue in 1866, Jonah Nathan became a senior partner in the firm.
6. Ms. N. 121, Miriam Nathan to N., 20 Dec. 1883: "I should like to know every language I could learn; it was always a pleasure to me to study languages when I
was young." Ms. N. 131 contains a letter to Jonah Nathan from Walter Wren, a tutor preparing N.'s younger brother Robert for the Indian Civil Service examination, pointing out that Robert would be at a disadvantage because he "... had no classics" (7 Oct. 1883).

7. Nathaniel Nathan, the son of Jonah Nathan's marriage to his cousin Olivia Josephs in 1846, began his legal training before the marriage to Miriam Nathan in 1860. Of the six sons of this second marriage, only the youngest (George) did not succeed in examinations and Miriam Nathan first attempted to interest him in a brewing business before buying him a junior partnership in the publishing firm of Constable and Company. Of the three sons who entered the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, Matthew graduated first (1880) and Walter second (1886) in the Royal Engineers class, and Frederick fourth (1879) among the Royal Artillery group. Robert was sixth (1887), despite his lack of classics, in the highly competitive Indian Civil Service examination and William, whom his mother regarded as indolent about his studies (Ms. N. 121, Miriam Nathan to N., 25 Sept. 1884), was eighth in the Coopers Hill course for prospective Indian Public Works Department engineers.

8. Among the rare references to her faith in letters to N. is Miriam Nathan's remark, 17 Sept. 1884 (Ms. N. 121): "... Papa wishes everyone home who can be for the fast. I shall be very glad when that day is over; I cannot say that I ever feel very devotional".


10. It is noteworthy that N. and his three brothers who also followed careers in the public services were marked out for a section to themselves in Paul Emden, *Jews of Great Britain: A Series of Biographies* (London, n.d. [ca 1944]), pp. 431-35. An analysis of names in professional directories of the 1890s revealed that only 5% were Jewish, whereas there were 22% among manufacturers, 21% among merchants, 16% among brokers and 39% in retail trade; see V.D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950* (London, 1954), p. 79.


12. In his *New Introductory Lectures in Psycho-Analysis* (London, 1933), pp. 89-90, Freud remarked: "... if one is writing a biography it is very difficult to suppress the urge for psychological understanding"; and he proceeded to illustrate the danger with a particularly minatory example of a biographer's error of omission in failing to note his subject's adult reaction against maternal rejection. It may be said that Freud committed an equally serious error of commission in attempting to psychoanalyse the dead in his contribution to Freud and William C. Bullitt, *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-eighth President of the United States: A Psychological Study* (London, 1967).

13. Ms N. 124, Miriam Nathan to N., 29 Aug. 1905: "I wish the other boys would take a lesson from you—their letters are rare and very irregular".


15. For example, Ms. N. 121, 25 Sept. 1884, referring to Jonah Nathan's anxiety about his health: "... indeed, I cannot see anything the matter with him myself, except that he is 74 and getting an old man".


18. The tutor Walter Wren informed Jonah Nathan that Robert, then preparing for
the Indian Civil Service examination, needed family encouragement: "Your son has been comparing himself, to his own disadvantage, with his brother Matthew. He is a little discouraged and distrustful of his powers in mathematics" (Ms. N. 131, 7 Oct. 1883).


21. Brig.-Gen. Sir James E. Edmunds, "Memoir: Lieut.-Colonel the Right Hon. Sir Matthew Nathan, P.C., G.C.M.G., D.L.", The Royal Engineers Journal, LIII (Sept., 1939), 458. Memory of this incident may account for Nathan's later description of Woolwich as a place of "drudgery and stupid cadets" when he tried unsuccessfully to dissuade his elder brother Frederick from accepting a position as a Woolwich instructor; he thought the position suitable "only for a captain with a wife and 6 children" (Ms. N. 104, N. to Miriam Nathan, 22 Feb. 1885).

22. The Times (London), 19 May 1880.


26. N. to Miriam Nathan, 7 Feb. 1881 (Ms. N. 102) and 18 Jan. 1885 (Ms. N. 104).

27. Ms. N. 106, N. to Miriam Nathan, 17 Jan. 1886, remarking on a letter from his brother William, then studying civil engineering at Coopers Hill: "We are taught a few general principles at Chatham and only learn by the misapplication of them in actual work".


31. The article in Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940 (London, 1949), p. 11, refers to G.S. Clarke's slow progress in the army and to his "masterful spirit" as Governor of Victoria and of Bombay. There are few references to his having made enemies in the services but frequent illustrations of his assertive personality in Clarke's memoirs, My Working Life (London, 1927).

32. N. to Miriam Nathan, 9 Nov. and 2 Dec. 1883 (Ms. N. 103), and 23 Feb. 1888 (Ms. N. 108); in the 1888 letter N. was commenting on what he regarded as the unwillingness of his half-brother Nathaniel, then a judge in the West Indies, to tolerate "nasty people".


34. N. to Miriam Nathan, 5 Oct. 1884 (Ms. N. 104) and 27 Dec. 1885 (Ms. N. 106).


36. Ms. N. 103, N. to Miriam Nathan, 3 March 1884. The ordinance for which Nathan prepared a preliminary draft was No. 7 of 1885, the Fortifications Lands Ordinance, which provided for the resumption by the Crown of land at Falconbridge Point and at King Tom's Point, twenty seven lots at the latter site ranging in size from one to four acres being traced to original allottees who were to be compensated for the loss of their land where title could be proved; see Edward Turner Packard and Donald Fortescue Wilbraham (eds), Ordinances of the Colony of Sierra Leone, Vol. I (London, 1908), 114-17.


40. Ms. N. 12, 18 March 1885.
41. Ms. N. 105, N. to Miriam Nathan, 9 Aug. 1885. Nathan's article appeared in *Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers* (Chatham, 1887), XI, 35-55. The light railway was 53½ miles long and ran through difficult terrain, crossed by innumerable watercourses which flooded in the wet season.
42. Ms. N. 107, N. to Miriam Nathan, 30 Jan. 1887.
44. Ms. N. 108, N. to Miriam Nathan, 11 Nov. 1887, referring to his correspondence with Major Hildebrand, second-in-command of the Indian Military Works Department.
45. Ms. N. 110, N. to Miriam Nathan, 21 March 1890.
47. Ms. N. 110,  N. to Miriam Nathan, 21 March 1890.
49. Ms. N. 109, N. to Miriam Nathan, 21 March 1890.
50. This brief episode is discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 38-39.
51. Mary Cholmondeley's letters to Nathan are in Ms. N. 132 and cover the long period of their friendship from 1897 until the onset of her fatal illness in 1924. Except for a few laconic acceptances of her invitations, none of Nathan's replies have been preserved. On Miss Cholmondeley's accomplishments as a popular novelist of the late Victorian and Edwardian years, see the brief and rather sycophantic tribute by Percy Lubbock, *Mary Cholmondeley: A Sketch from Memory* (London, 1928).
52. Ms. N. 132, 12 Aug. 1904.
54. Ms. N. 132, 14 Sept. 1909. Nathan had then recently accepted the position of Secretary of the British Post Office, a singularly office-bound job which, Miss Cholmondeley obviously thought, suited Nathan's temperament as well as "Uncle Tom's" work as a clerk in a trading house.
55. Of 69 officers assigned to the expedition, one died of malaria and 26 were invalided; see E.W.C. Sandes, *The Military Engineer in India* (2 vols; Chatham, 1933-35), I, 460-462.
57. Ibid., 28 Oct. 1889.
60. Edited after Nathan's death by M.M. Postan, who took over the task from his wife ( and Nathan's literary executor) Eileen Power after her premature death, *The Annals of West Coker* (Cambridge, 1957) was an abridged version of a larger typescript which Nathan bequeathed to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. The lengthy search for a publisher and the raising of over 2,000 as a subscription from friends to subsidize the publication by Cambridge University Press is recorded in the papers of Nathan's nephew and heir, Edward J. Nathan (Mss. Eng. Hist. ca. 462-64), held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.
63. Ms. N. Res. C. 89, Mills to N., 18 and 24 March 1898.
64. Ms. N. 109, N. to Miriam Nathan, 11 Nov. 1890.
66. This judgment on the decline of C.D.C. influence is drawn from Johnson, *Defence*
by Committee, who concluded that in the period 1895-1902 colonial defence policy was lost in a “galaxy of organizations” (pp. 32-36).

67. The C.D.C. records for Nathan’s term as secretary, 1895-1900, are in Cab. 7/7 (minutes), Cab. 8/1-2 (memoranda) and Cab. 9/1 (remarks). Meticulously kept, they are a testimony to the committee’s awareness that the days when it could virtually dictate policy had passed when the cabinet seized the power, if not the initiative, in the colonial defence field.

68. Cab. 8/1, memorandum of 29 May 1896.

69. The three were Nathan, Sir John Clauson and Sir John Chancellor; see History of the Royal Engineers, (2 vols., London, 1889), ed. Whitworth Porter, II, 285-312, and III (Chatham, 1915), ed. Charles M. Watson, 219-240, for a discussion of Royal Engineers who served as governors and in other non-military services.

70. This story was repeated without question by Nathan’s obituarist in The Times (London), 19 April 1939.

71. Ms. N. 246 contains N.’s notes of an interview with Chamberlain, 24 Nov. 1896, concerning the defence of Canadian coastal bases “in the event of war with America”. Ms. N. 140 includes Chamberlain’s official letter concerning the C.M.G., 31 Dec. 1898.

72. Ms. N. 33 (diary), 10 Dec. 1898. The Colonial Office “Patronage” files (C.O. 429) for 1898-99 contain no reference to Nathan’s application, apparently for two reasons: he was a contender for a more senior position than that usually handled by correspondence; and the files consist almost entirely of letters from young men who had failed in entrance examinations for the home and Indian civil services and the army and who were almost without exception refused the saving grace of a colonial appointment.

73. The 1899 figures, compiled from the Colonial Office List of that year, exclude the three “fortress” colonies of Gibraltar, Malta and Bermuda, governed by serving generals, and the nine Canadian provinces, all but one of whose lieutenant-governors were local. The sole exception, Sir H.E. McCallum (whom Nathan later succeeded as Governor of Natal), was a former Royal Engineer who moved to the colonial service via a post as private secretary to a governor in 1875. The three governors in 1899 who had started “at the top” were: R.A. Sterndale (St. Helena), formerly of the Indian Civil Service; Sir J. West Ridgeway, a retired colonel who worked his way through senior posts in India and Ireland to the prized governorship in Ceylon; and Sir H.A. Blake, Nathan’s predecessor in Hong Kong, who began in the Irish police and administered three colonies before he became governor in turn of Hong Kong and Ceylon. For the 1830-1880 period, see the analysis by John W. Cell, British Colonial Administration in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Policy-Making Process (New Haven, Conn., 1970), pp. 47-53.

74. Analyses of governors’ backgrounds in the twentieth century have been carried out by Robert V. Kubicek for 1903 and Kenneth Robinson for the period 1919-1939. In The Administration of Imperialism: Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office (Durham, N.C., 1969), Kubicek concludes (p. 49) that fifteen of twenty-nine governors in 1903 began in the colonial ranks and, of the remaining fourteen, seven were former military officers. In the inter-war period, when the professionalization process reached its peak, 54 of 103 governors were career colonial service men and 28 of 49 “outsiders” had transferred from the army or navy; see Robinson, The Dilemmas of Trusteeship: Aspects of British Colonial Policy between the Wars (London, 1965), pp. 45-48.

75. Furse’s memoirs, Aucuparius: Recollections of a Recruiting Officer (London,
1962) and Robert Heussler, *Yesterday’s Rulers: The Making of the British Colonial Service* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1963) are both at pains to emphasize Furse’s role in reforming what Heussler calls (p. 25) the “intuitive and elitist” recruitment system for the colonial service before the First World War. Insofar as this suggests that the prized post of governor was reserved for supernumary soldiers and political friends of the government in office, this assessment is to be read in the light of Cell’s and Kubicek’s conclusion that the Colonial Office had already partially purged the colonial service of nepotism and a preference for the military mentality before Furse’s appointment in 1910.


77. An illustration of this sense of limited career opportunities in the army in Nathan’s time was the Royal Engineers’ habit of referring to Charles Gordon as “our only General” when he was in Khartoum under siege and Gladstone’s government hesitated over the decision to relieve him. In the 1885 letter (see note 39 above) in which Nathan complained about the rapid advancement of Spencer Childers, the son of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he used this phrase to refer to Gordon. Nathan continued, despite his typically Anglo-Jewish preference for Liberal policies, to regard Gladstone, the Liberal leader, as “that dangerous old man” (Ms. N. 109, N. to Miriam Nathan, 12 July 1889).

78. CO. 267/445, minute by Antrobus, 28 March 1899.

79. Ms. N. 34 (diary), 13 Feb. 1899, recording a discussion with Antrobus at the Colonial Office.


81. Sir John Pope Hennessy, a failed politician, was thirty-three when he went to govern Labuan in 1867 and thirty-seven (the same age as Nathan) when he moved to Sierra Leone; see James Pope-Hennessy, *Verandah: Some Episodes in the Crown Colonies, 1867-1889* (London, 1964). Emden, *Jews of Great Britain*, p. 434, notes that Nathan was the first professing Jew to govern a British colony; the only analogy is with Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, Ambassador to Spain (1891-1900), a Foreign Office appointee who first achieved prominence in commerce and was the product of a family whose Jewish faith lapsed before he became a public figure.

82. Ms. N. 140, Bertram Abrahams (secretary of the Maccabaeans) to N., 9 March 1899, and N.’s draft reply, n.d. [ca 12 March].

83. Quoting a speech by Elgin in 1906 in which the term “men on the spot” is used, Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill*, pp. 478-79, concludes that “Governors usually got their way”, though three occurrences might alter this rule: the attraction of public attention, spending too much money and “the slightest suspicion … that [a governor’s] judgment was becoming faulty”. It is notable that Hyam cites only two instances of governors whose views prevailed over those of Whitehall but four who were reined in (Lord Selborne, Sir John Rodger, Lesley Probyn and Sir Caven-dish Boyle).

84. For example, Michael Crowder describes the “junior administrators” in the colonies as “The White Chiefs of Tropical Africa” (“Colonialism in Africa, Vol. II: History and Politics of Colonialism, 1914-1960,” ed. L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan [Cambridge, 1970] 328-29): “… up to the end of the 1930s communications were generally so poor that officials in out-of-the-way bush stations experienced very little interference from their superiors. They were very much their
own masters. They could conveniently fail to obey an instruction by being away when it arrived, and no one would be any the wiser". The "man-on-the-spot" thesis which Crowder seeks to transpose into the twentieth century was first proposed by John S. Galbraith in his article on sporadic British expansion at the behest of governors in India, Malaya and South Africa in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century ("The 'Turbulent Frontier' as a Factor in British Expansion", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, II, 2 [Jan., 1960], 150-168) and is elaborated for South Africa in his *Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African Frontier, 1834-1854* (Berkeley, 1963).

85. Robinson, *Dilemmas of Trusteeship*, p. 48, exemplifies this tendency to measure governors by the Lugard yardstick of independence, applauding Cameron, Clifford and Guggisberg as "three remarkable Governors" and describing their unnamed contemporaries as maintaining "a high average of commonsense practicality".


When Sir David Chalmers returned from Sierra Leone in 1899 con­vinced that the rebellion in the Protectorate in the previous year was the result, not of “inevitable conflict between ancient barbarism and an advancing civilisation” but of the imposition of “a peremptory and regular collected impost ... unknown in [African] practices and traditions”, Joseph Chamberlain was doubly embarrassed. As Secretary of State, Chamberlain had not only approved the hut tax but was responsible for the appointments of Cardew, who ad­ministered its collection, and of Chalmers, who condemned “the whole scheme adopted by the Colonial authorities”. Chamberlain was dismayed, as he confessed to his Colonial Office advisers:

I fear that, contrary to my expectations, the Report will condemn and not whitewash the Governor and all his boys .... If Sir D. Chalmers was not our choice, I should have something to say on his Report, but it is a difficult and invidious, not to say a dangerous task, to discredit your own witness.

Pressures closer at hand than Sierra Leone were pulling Chamberlain in opposite directions. The Chambers of Commerce in Britain, notably the Liverpool-based interests which dominated the west African trade, supported Chalmers’ opinions that the hut tax was disruptive and Cardew overbearing. In the vanguard of this cam­paign were two persuasive publicists, E.D. Morel and Mary Kingsley, each calling explicitly for the abolition of the tax and im-
licitly for Cardew’s recall. But there was an equally persuasive in-
fluence on Chamberlain, with a readier access to his ear and a stern determination to remind him that the colonial future was as crucial as the political present; Lord Selborne, parliamentary under-
secretary of the colonies, put and answered the crucial question: “... how can we ever impose a tax [in other African colonies] which we have stamped as unjust and inexpedient in Sierra Leone? ... What a fatal lesson to the West Coast Native—You have only to rebel and the English Government will never dare impose on you that direct taxation it imposes on everyone else.” Although Chamberlain decided to await Chalmers’ full report before settling a question of such dimensions, it is plain from his interview with Nathan on March 6 (when he had already decided to recall Cardew to answer Chalmers’ criticisms) that he had made up his mind to follow Selborne’s advice, for he instructed Nathan to carry on the ad-
ministration on the broad lines laid down by Cardew. If this was not a sufficient hint for the new acting governor, he specifically required Nathan to continue the collection of the tax and to report on the ad-
visability of extending it to the Colony, whose Creole population in Freetown were inveterate opponents of direct taxation.

Nathan’s willing acquiescence in Chamberlain’s schemes might have been easier if he had been allowed to sail for Freetown without exposure to the views of those in England who abhorred the hut tax. However, only two days after he was first told by the Colonial Office that he was under consideration for the Sierra Leone appointment, he met Mary Kingsley for the first time at a London dinner party. The meeting was possibly accidental, since the public announcement of his posting to the colony did not appear until three weeks later, but the Chambers of Commerce, which had their antennae alert to developments in the Colonial Office, could have got wind of Chamberlain’s intention to recall Cardew and even of the likelihood that Nathan would act in his place. Mary Kingsley set out, during private discussions at her house and in frequent letters to him both in London and in Freetown, to convert Nathan to her opinion that the hut tax was, like the greased cartridge in the Indian Mutiny, an affront to custom and an invitation to rebellion; for the west African native, whose views she thought she knew as a result of her celebrated explorations, direct taxation amounted to “the confiscation of the thing taxed” and the breach of a trust, for “... when we have said that we don’t mean to confiscate their property we ought not to con-
fiscate it”.

Nathan’s willingness to espouse Mary Kingsley’s cause was
limited not only by his eagerness to do Chamberlain's bidding but by a complication in his relations with her which made him dubious about her motives for wanting their acquaintance to grow into a close friendship. Like Mary Cholmondeley a spinster on the verge of middle age when Nathan met her, Mary Kingsley was not content to confine her relations with him to the level of confidant, where he felt at ease and able to respond in kind. She wanted the affection denied her by her brother George and the other male members of her family, including her uncle Charles, author of *The Water Babies*, who, until her bid for independence on her West African journeys, had treated her as a closeted housekeeper. In men of action like Sir George Goldie, the Royal Niger Company leader whom she admired inordinately, she found some substitute for the familial warmth she pined for. But in the younger Nathan she apparently saw more, an intimate friend and perhaps a potential husband. In the opinion of one of her biographers, she displayed in her brief relationship with him "all the signs of a woman in love". It was a curious, slightly awestruck love which she described as "fear", declaring that she did not care whether "... anyone, from Joe Chamberlain to the dustman, understands me or not, but you are the exception". In this letter, written on March 12 as Nathan left for Sierra Leone, she said of this "fear":

... if I hid it once I could not look you in the face again, and I must be able to, it is the one thing worth having, living or dead .... Some day forgive me boring you with this and remember as kindly as you can that melancholy thing that will always serve and fear you.

The sense of final parting with which the letter ended hints at her realization that Nathan did not share her valuation of their friendship and this was confirmed by his cool and formal reply, in which he refrained from any comment on her bared soul beyond a passing reference to her "vivid and direct letter" and remained non-committal about her views on the hut tax. By the time he left Sierra Leone and Mary Kingsley set out for South Africa, where she died as a result of enteric fever caught while she was working in the Boer concentration camps, their letters reverted to exchanges of conflicting views on the justice of colonial rule and on the activities of missionaries, with Nathan adopting a rather uncomfortable role as defender of Christian proselytizing against Miss Kingsley’s strictures. Nathan was no unqualified admirer of the missionaries in Freetown but he preferred them as the banner-bearers of European civilization to the "gallant band" of white traders who were Mary Kingsley’s heroes.
Failed as a hero-husband for Miss Kingsley, Nathan was still not entirely free of her influence on his way to Freetown, for she sent him a copy of her newly published book *West African Studies* to read on the sea voyage. He mulled over the arguments she advanced in that somewhat sentimentalized tract but concluded, even before he reached the coastal Colony, let alone the Protectorate, that the hut tax was "not against natural or English justice". On these grounds of Victorian logic, duly supplemented by Chamberlain's broad hint that the tax was also not against his present policy or Nathan's future aspirations, he decided that, however "foreign to native customs" a direct tax might be, it should be retained. Cardew's fault lay in implementing the tax too quickly and collecting it too harshly. Here was a characteristic compromise, poised between Chalmers' attacks on the method and Cardew's defence of the principle of imposing a tribute on subject peoples; Nathan was preparing himself to see in Sierra Leone what Chamberlain wanted him to see, that the hut tax not only could but should be collected, provided the administration was humane and flexible in its attitudes towards the Protectorate's population, still agitated by Cardew's imperious and forceful policies.

This tentative view was to be reinforced on Nathan's arrival by the behaviour of Cardew, who was on the point of returning to England. Cardew clearly interpreted Nathan's appointment as a hint from the Colonial Office that his recall would be permanent. Gore as Colonial Secretary held the usual dormant commission to act in the governor's absence and, although he had no more confidence in Gore than the Colonial Office had, Cardew had naturally assumed that if his recall was to be merely temporary no need would arise for the despatch of an administrator for London. Cardew's suspicion that Nathan was being blooded as his successor undoubtedly accounts for the rebuff he gave Nathan on his arrival in Freetown; instead of greeting him with the usual formalities, he sent a curt note to the wharf announcing that he was off on a picnic—a farewell given by what Nathan was to infer was a devoted staff—and informing the newcomer that he could join the party if he felt so inclined.10

Despite the coolness of his reception, Nathan remained sufficiently unruffled to form a balanced impression of Cardew. On the credit side, he found Cardew "very strong and able" and possessed of an impressive air of command, a judgement shared by the Colonial Office, where Reginald Antrobus later described Cardew as "outstanding amid mediocrity". But in Nathan's opinion Cardew's virtues were so inflexible that under pressure they tended to harden into
vices; his high seriousness and insistence on obedience had made him almost universally detested by the politically conscious element, official and unofficial, in Creole Freetown, while his irresistible purpose made him see all his critics as disloyal opponents to be crushed, rather than as sectional interests to be conciliated.\textsuperscript{12}

In this respect Nathan and Cardew were opposites. On occasion Nathan, too, was to prove as conscious of his dignity as any governor, but he was zealous in avoiding the growth of impenetrable barriers between himself and his subordinates. To some extent the differences between the two men were temperamental but their religious upbringing and military experience had moulded contrasting attitudes towards the use of \textit{force majeure} in dealings with underlings. Cardew was an evangelical Christian of the militant type, to whom the use of corrective measures against the unenlightened was not repugnant, while his military service had brought him into direct conflict with hostile natives in India and southern Africa, reinforcing his inclination to use the mailed fist. For Nathan, a member of a self-conscious religious minority, it was natural to exhaust all forms of persuasion before resorting to \textit{fiat} or to force, and as an engineer his main contact with natives had been in relatively passive and tractable work gangs.

In their few days together in Freetown, Cardew and Nathan remained on amicable, if cool, terms. But from the ship to England Cardew sent Nathan a private letter which amounted to a set of instructions.\textsuperscript{13} Though it contained no specific reference to Cardew's belief that he would return to Sierra Leone, the letter implied that he expected to be exonerated and probably to be reinstated. Nathan ignored the implication, apparently (as he explained in a later letter to Cardew) because he recalled the Governor's remark, in a private conversation, that he did not want to return to the colony.\textsuperscript{14} This misunderstanding, assuming that on Nathan's part it was a genuine one, explains the rapidity with which he moved from the role of a mere \textit{locum tenens}, administering Cardew's policies and fulfilling the special missions assigned to him by Chamberlain, to that of a virtual heir-apparent, free in his own judgment to carry through minor innovations. Focussing initially in his formal reports to the Colonial Office on the condition of the Protectorate, on the morale of the Frontier Police whom Chalmers had described as domineering "little judges and governors", and on the decline of Freetown's trade with the "northern rivers" on the border of French Guinea, he moved by July to new projects, by then assuming that Cardew's absence would be either lengthy or permanent. When the Colonial Office and
Cardew, the latter in brusque terms, informed him in late July that the Governor was to return, Nathan served out the rest of his term attempting to balance an impression of adhering to Cardew’s instructions against the hasty implementation of such of his own schemes as had Cardew’s real or tacit approval. Throughout his seven months in Sierra Leone, his solicitous pursuit of the approval of his superiors was earning him the status he coveted, that of a potential governor in his own right.

In the first phase, Nathan turned out reports with a speed and facility which impressed a Colonial Office even more ignorant of Sierra Leone conditions than he was. The first, containing his views on the hut tax and the causes of the rebellion, was written after he had been in the colony only two weeks and in office for an even shorter space. Having not then visited any part of the hinterland Protectorate, Nathan merely synthesized the views of others. Conscious of the report’s limitations, he submitted it to Chamberlain in a private letter, though this might have been a device to provide the Secretary of State with an easy way out if he wanted to exclude the report from publication in a Blue-book intended for public and parliamentary scrutiny.

The report began by condemning the speed with which Cardew had imposed the tax and also the Governor’s lack of sympathy for the Protectorate chiefs and their dislike of the ban on slave-trading. Having read so far, Chamberlain might have been excused for fearing that once again he was to be embarrassed by an on-the-spot report similar to that of Chalmers. But Nathan had got Chamberlain’s message; he went on to disagree with Chalmers on every point except the abruptness with which the tax had been introduced. Apparently basing his views on Freetown gossip and Cardew’s self-interested remarks in private discussions, for the full report and evidence of the Chalmers commission was not available when Nathan wrote in April, he rejected as unreliable the testimony from African witnesses that the hut tax was a novelty and the prime cause of the rising, concluding that Chalmers, an experienced lawyer and judge, had been guilty of asking leading questions. Worse still, in Nathan’s code of honour, Chalmers had cast doubt on the credulity of official witnesses, “...sometimes by direct statement and sometimes by invidious allusion”. Nathan then proceeded not only to attack Chalmers’ central recommendation, that the hut tax should be abolished forthwith, but also argued against an earlier proposal of J.C.E. Parkes, the respected African who had served as Secretary of the Sierra Leone Native Affairs Department, that the government
should collect a less regular tribute in the Protectorate. Uncritically accepting the information from the District Commissioners that the hut tax was being paid willingly, he justified its retention, in terms reminiscent of those used by Selborne, as a symbol of British rule which "... we believe will save [the Protectorate] from cruelty and oppression".

Since Nathan knew of Chamberlain's hopes to retain the hut tax, this argument seems sycophantic, but it was as much an indication of naivety as of a calculating attempt to subordinate truth to his own ambition. He had visited no part of the Protectorate when he wrote to Chamberlain in April but he was anxious to submit an informal report before the Chalmers report went to Parliament. Not questioning the testimony of Cardew and his district administrators that the tax was coming in or enquiring whether it was being collected under threat, Nathan described the condition of the Protectorate through the eyes of men with a vested interest in creating an impression of a return to normal. When at last, after two months under these partisan influences, Nathan visited the more readily accessible districts of Ronietta, to the east, in June and Karene, to the north, in July, he formed a different impression.

Cardew had toured Ronietta late in 1898 and reported the Mende willingly paying the tax and rebuilding villages destroyed by the government's punitive expedition during the rebellion. Seven months later, Nathan discovered few Africans near the district headquarters at Rotifunk and the Acting District Commissioner told him that the people had "gone bush" in fear of punishment for their part in the rebellion. South of Rotifunk Nathan observed the rebuilding of destroyed huts in progress but nearer the headquarters all was still in ruins. In Karene district he found a similar situation: extensive rebuilding in the important trading town of Kambia but deserted villages nearer the administrative headquarters at Karene, the occupants hiding in the bush at news of his approach. "Loyal" chiefs who had resisted the rebels' incitement in 1898 were in state of panic; at Moyamba in Ronietta district Madam Yoko and Madam Tucker pleaded with Nathan to restore their police bodyguards which had been withdrawn at the end of hostilities. After verifying with the District Commissioner that the chiefs were in real danger, he granted their request.

Madam Yoko also petitioned for the right to rebuild her town of Taiama, razed by Cardew's order in retaliation for the murder there of two American missionaries. Nathan was shocked by the effect of this decree on the natives' morale and recommended to Chamberlain
that it should be rescinded to permit the rebuilding of Taiama and
three other towns destroyed on Cardew's orders. He also proposed
that, while the hut tax should be retained in principle, pressure for
payment of the current year's levy should be reduced, for it was being
collected under duress and not, as Cardew asserted, with ease. The
feared Frontier Police, many of them freed slaves under no effective
European control, should not only be concentrated under the eyes of
their officers, as Cardew planned, but amalgamated with the West
African Regiment as a military force under firm discipline. The win­
ning over of the Protectorate peoples, he concluded, would never be
accomplished until the colonial government renounced its
"revengeful attitude".17

While firsthand experience of the Protectorate altered Nathan's
views, his unwelcome advice that the hut tax continued to be a
grievance in the districts he had toured arrived too late to shift
Chamberlain's determination to retain both the tax and Cardew.
After delaying as long as possible, in the hope (which proved to be
justified) that events in South Africa later culminating in the Boer
War would distract public attention from Sierra Leone, Chamberlain
tabled Chalmers' report and Cardew's reply in the Commons in July,
though the debate did not come on until August. There was little in­
terest in and no concerted opposition to Chamberlain's conclusion
that the principle of direct taxation must be upheld in the Protec­
torate. His policies and methods restored to favour, Cardew was
automatically Governor of Sierra Leone again.

While Nathan's despatches on the Protectorate had no impact on
Chamberlain, they drove a wedge between Cardew and his locum
tenens. Sent to Cardew by the Colonial Office before he left London,
Nathan's stream of recommendations had irritated the Governor
and, at the phrase "revengeful attitude", he exploded with righteous
anger. What right had Nathan, in Ronietta for only a few days, to
form such a decided opinion on its economic condition and morale?
Had Cardew not announced before his departure that rank-and-file
rebels were to be forgiven? Though Nathan's report on the Protec­
torate was the last straw, Cardew already suspected Nathan of a
systematic attempt to undermine his reputation in order to clear the
way to becoming his successor. Politely in a letter to Chamberlain in
September and more bluntly in a note to Nathan in July, as soon as
the news of his exoneration was out, Cardew rejected all Nathan's
proposals for policy changes. These minor proposals reflected
Nathan's state of mind in late June and early July when he had tem­
porarily ceased to regard himself as a mere commissioner and had
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

not yet heard that Cardew was to return; they included recommendations that a reassessment of the tax be carried out every five years and that a corps of carriers be raised for transport to the interior because the railway, then under construction, would be unremunerative for many years.18

Though he had implied it in his earlier complaints, Cardew reserved until he was back in Sierra Leone his accusation that Nathan had tried to discredit him in order to take his place. In a private letter to Antrobus at the Colonial Office, he reported that “like all new brooms” Nathan had tried “to sweep a little too clean”:19

He has tried to take the wind out of my sails two or three times, in a manner which was not quite fair; he knows my opinion about it for I spoke to him on the matter before he left and told him that I did not think he had acted with proper consideration for me.

Although Nathan’s attempted innovations had been the ostensible reason for Cardew’s strictures, the real cause lay deeper. Nathan was relatively popular with officials and with the Creole population of Freetown. Initially Nathan’s warm reception from both groups resulted from the simple fact that, as one writer has put it, he was “not Cardew”,20 but by the time he left the Colony he had earned their respect in his own right. In the case of the officials this was largely a question of temperament, since Nathan was less aloof from his subordinates than Cardew, though he had also won their support by reviving Cardew’s defunct proposal that the hardworked District Commissioners in the Protectorate should be given assistants, whose salaries were to be covered by a reduction in the number of Frontier Police. Cardew rejected the economy but could not accuse Nathan of going outside his guidelines with the proposal for assistant D.C.’s, having foreshadowed such appointments himself in 1897. But he refused to allow Nathan to start the scheme, reserving the credit for himself.21

While his relations with Cardew were uneasy and grew more hostile as the months went by, Nathan won a measure of respect from the Creoles whom he had privately described as “niggers” when he first came into contact with them in the 1880s. His youthful need for an assured status had then made him contemptuous of their attempts to establish a similar acceptability in Freetown’s political and social milieu but, with the solid if temporary dignities of the governorship to support him, he was more charitable and more discreet during 1899. Again he benefited from the fact that he was “not
Cardew”, for the Governor had accused the Freetown press and politicians of sympathizing with, and even of inciting, the Protectorate rebels, whereas Nathan shared Chalmers’ opinion that this charge was exaggerated.

In June Nathan added to a reputation for courage and clemency when a riot broke out in Freetown and he took personal command of the pacification. The outbreak began with a quarrel between a Creole policeman and a soldier of the West African Regiment, the policeman dying from a blow on the head from a rifle butt. Inflamed by this act of brutality, the Creoles turned their anger on Freetown’s Mende immigrants, of the same tribal group as the guilty soldier. Nathan decided that imperial prestige must be subordinated to the restoration of order and he marched the regiment out of the city to Kortright Hill for its own safety. As the column moved out, it was stoned by Creole bystanders and several soldiers were wounded. To prevent an open conflict and possible rebellion, Nathan ordered the West Indian Regiment, the garrison force composed mainly of Jamaicans who had been on relatively good terms with the Creoles, to provide the African soldiers with an escort. The white commander of the West Indian Regiment protested that the crowd’s hostility might turn on his men and took the legalistic stand that the garrison’s function was to defend Freetown from foreign forces, not to prevent internecine fights. Nathan would have no truck with this timidity and he invoked his emergency powers to put the West Indians on duty as roving picquets to break up threatening crowds. Disturbances continued sporadically for a week; day and night Nathan walked the streets remonstrating with the rioters and on occasion taking sticks from their hands.22 With him went Sir Samuel Lewis, Nathan’s “miserable native lawyer” of the 1880s who was now Mayor of Freetown and an unofficial member of the Legislative Council.23 Though in this emergency Lewis joined forces with Nathan to restore order, they were still at loggerheads over principle, for Nathan refused a request from the moderate Creoles, including Lewis, to move the West African Regiment away from Kortright to the Protectorate, Nathan insisting that it would be “... most unwise to take such action in response to the clamour of an unruly mob”. Despite this determination, the Freetown press made Nathan the hero of the hour, crediting him with a virtually single-handed suppression of the riot and a laudable restraint towards the rioters in the streets.24

Nathan and Lewis cooperated in another project which, though less dramatic than his riot control, Nathan regarded as his major ac-
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

complishment in Sierra Leone. As an engineer and an enthusiast for the Victorian concept of civilization through sanitation, Nathan was appalled to find that Freetown's appearance and hygienic condition had not improved in the twelve years since his last visit as Commanding Royal Engineer, and he set about trying to establish strict regulations for the construction and maintenance of privately owned buildings. He soon discovered that he could not easily act through administrative fiat, for Freetown had been granted municipal status in 1893 and since 1895 had a freely elected mayor and council jealous of their powers in local government. Cardew had warned Nathan of the council's inadequacies, especially its inability to collect the licence fees it was empowered to impose and its unwillingness to enforce the few by-laws it had passed in its short existence.25

Concluding that any municipal by-law to regulate building would be a dead letter, Nathan decided to circumvent the council and to incorporate his planning regulations in a Legislative Council ordinance.26 Lewis's dual role as Legislative Council member and Mayor made him a vital part of the plan; to sweeten the pill, Nathan asked Lewis, an able lawyer, to draft the ordinance and then proceeded in private letters to press for a strong measure containing effective sanctions against delinquent property owners.27

Apparently anxious about the public's reception of the ordinance, Lewis was slow to complete the draft and to introduce it into the Legislative Council. Nathan became alarmed that the ordinance might not pass before his departure and that he would lose the credit for it. When at last Lewis completed his task, Nathan ordered that it be given priority over a backlog of work building up in the printing office and by late September, with the ordinance deadlocked in the Legislative Council, he wrote despairingly to his mother that Cardew would probably have the "pleasure" of seeing it enacted.28

The reason for the delay in the Legislative Council was the opposition of Abraham S. Hebron, Lewis's colleague as an unofficial member but his rival in Freetown politics. The Council minutes give no hint as to why Hebron voted against the first reading but Nathan took the unusual step of recording his view that Hebron's vote was "a pity".29 Believing that unanimity in the Legislative Council was essential if his plan to bypass the Freetown council was to succeed, Nathan thought that Hebron was harbouring a personal grievance against him, dating from his previous visit when the two had clashed over some obscure matter arising from Nathan's engineering duties.30 Hebron was probably moved less by such memories than by his association with small property holders who regarded him as
their spokesman and who would be unfavourably affected by restrictions on the construction of premises. For some reason—possibly in response to private overtures from Nathan and Lewis—Hebron changed his mind between the first and second reading stages and the Freetown Improvement Ordinance passed unanimously only a week before Nathan left Sierra Leone. Since it weighed heavily on owners whose properties had fallen into disrepair and because it marked out an older section of Freetown as "unfireproof" (implying that fires there would be allowed to act as slum-clearance agents by burning themselves out), the measure was unpopular and it was as well for Nathan's local reputation that he was not obliged to remain in Freetown to explain it to hostile Creole property holders.

Another unpopular and far-reaching change in Freetown's ad hoc pattern of residential segregation, duly disguised as an attempt to improve hygiene and to counter the Colony's reputation as the White Man's Grave, originated in Nathan's brief term as acting governor. Dr Ronald Ross's Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine team carried out an investigation into the causes of malaria in Freetown during 1899 and concluded that the fever was attributable to the anopheles mosquito which bred in stagnant pools in the low-lying stretches of the peninsula. Initially sceptical about Ross's discoveries, Nathan cooperated to the extent of despatching a team of African labourers under a European overseer to destroy the breeding places, though he did nothing to stir the municipal government from its apathy about Ross's proposal for a massive clean-up campaign. Nathan was more enthusiastic about a suggestion for improving conditions for Europeans by segregating their residences on the Hill Station, about a thousand feet above the town and readily accessible only if a light railway was built to bring civil servants and traders to their offices. The cantonment which developed was not in existence in Nathan's term but he approved the idea and later tried to create a similar segregated area in Cape Coast when he was governor of the Gold Coast, unresponsive to African complaints that he was attacking long-standing traditions of residential integration.

As a Jew, Nathan steered a more cautious course among the rocks of competing sectarian interests in Freetown. He took care to emphasize his religious affiliation by taking the oath of office, like Rothschild in the House of Commons, with his helmet on his head and his hand on the Old Testament, but he avoided close connection with the handful of Jews resident in Sierra Leone. As a fervent Anglican, Cardew had been identified with the long-established Church Missionary Society and Nathan was anxious, despite his
nominal role as representative of the monarch and so of the Church of England, not to be embarrassed by any assumption that he shared Cardew's enthusiasm, especially since the C.M.S. centenary celebrations were to occur a month after his arrival. He therefore confined his activities to such secular occasions as the Wesleyan high school's prize-giving ceremony in May, and employed those official energies he gave to the religious life of the Colony in the relatively neutral sphere of promoting Moslem education.

Privately Nathan sympathized with the views of Dr Edward Blyden, an African author and enthusiast for cooperation between Christians and Moslems in Africa. Despite his momentary aberration in defending Christian missionaries against Mary Kingsley's criticisms, Nathan was not convinced that their Creole converts were a praiseworthy consequence of Christian teaching. He blamed the missionaries for what he regarded as Creole dishonesty in trade and intolerance towards the Mende and he heartily disliked the "sleek black parsons" of the Wesleyan mission in Freetown. In the same way as he had earlier declared a preference for the "obedient" Temne over the Creoles and for the Burmese over the Indians, he favoured the "dignified" Moslem community of Freetown before the town's Christian population. He therefore made it his objective to encourage Moslem attempts to establish schools where their religion and culture could be retained.

Nathan's interest in Islam had not extended beyond his rather half-hearted study of Arabic in Egypt and a scanning of a few popular books on the subject but he was encouraged in his plans for Moslem education by Blyden, who had lobbied for support from governors, from Sir John Pope Hennessy in the 1870s to Sir James Hay in 1890, both of whom were sympathetic towards his crusade for conserving the Moslem virtues in west Africa. Hay established two elementary schools, one at Fourah Bay and the other at Foulah Town but both had failed, partly because Hay's successors did not support them but mainly because of squabbles in the Moslem community. On his own initiative Nathan intervened to settle these differences, though he met with no success, and Blyden seized on this sign of interest to make a plea that Nathan try again, accompanying this request with a passionate revival of his dream to secure government support for a Moslem university in Freetown to serve the whole of British West Africa. Rejecting the university scheme as too grandiose while elementary education for Moslems was inadequate, Nathan recommended to the Colonial Office that subsidies be paid to any school which the community could establish and persuaded
the Foulah Town group to reopen their Pratt’s Farm project. He personally declared the school open in August but returned a week later to find it deserted. Pushing through an appropriation to prop up this school for the remainder of the year (it was operating again in September) he managed also to secure a grant for a school for Mandingo (Malinke) Moslems at Aberdeen. Though he reported these developments proudly to the Colonial Office, he added a caution that Cardew might not approve. But the Governor proved more liberal than Nathan feared, not only making allowance in the 1900 estimates for continued grants to the schools but taking up Nathan’s suggestion that Blyden be appointed Director of Moslem Education. In contrast, Nathan’s own enthusiasm for the cause did not survive his departure from Sierra Leone, for Mary Kingsley failed to raise his support for his “Moslem friends” when she heard that the C.M.S. was excluding Moslem trainees from Fourah Bay College, which was subsidized by the colonial government to prepare teachers for the local schools.39

Mary Kingsley’s attempts to win over Nathan to a vision of his role less conventional than that he had begun to adopt failed in another respect which must have disillusioned her more completely than his desertion of the Moslems. Miss Kingsley was the most prominent advocate of a scheme to involve European traders, not merely as consultants but as participants, in the government of the West African colonies. She proposed a “Grand Council” of Chambers of Commerce with the power to legislate for those colonies where trade rather than settlement was the essential motivation for the British presence40 and Nathan was at first attracted by the spirit, if not by the mechanics, of her plan. On his way out to Freetown he outlined a scheme which reflected his willingness to take the traders into the administration’s confidence by appointing a Secretary of Trade nominated by the Chambers of Commerce but responsible to the governor. To attract the right man, he hoped to offer a salary of £2,000 (the same as that paid to the governor but excluding his allowances), half to be contributed from colonial revenue and half by the Chambers. This senior official’s task would be the development of new trade with the Protectorate and the regaining of Freetown’s importance as an entrepot, undermined by the French success in channelling the “northern rivers” commerce away from the colony to Guinea. Conscious of the need to demonstrate to the Colonial Office his willingness to economize on administration, Nathan proposed to abolish the post of assistant colonial secretary to cover the government’s share of the “Secretary of Trade’s” salary.41
This sketchy idea never grew into a formal submission, both because experience showed it to be unworkable and because, after July, Nathan recognized that Cardew—still at daggers drawn with the Chambers over the hut tax—would never permit it. Nathan had apparently supposed that there would be a ready supply of potential candidates for the job among the colony’s merchants but he was soon disabused. After being in Freetown only a month, he raised in the Executive Council the question of appointing a local merchant to a Legislative Council vacancy but no one could think of a suitable candidate. The qualifications, unstated but understood, were European ancestry, residence in the colony for a substantial part of each year and at least a partnership in a merchant house. The four Europeans who remained in Sierra Leone for any appreciable period were all merely managing firms for principals living in Europe and the Executive Council did not deign to consider Creole traders who were regarded as immeasurably inferior to the Creole lawyers already represented on the Legislative Council.

Even when he was appointed to the Gold Coast, where he might have found among the European merchants more suitable candidates for a trade secretaryship, Nathan did not revive his idea of involving the Chambers of Commerce directly in government. Though this was to some extent a result of his conclusion that mining rather than general trade was the Gold Coast’s major developmental need, in that colony he found himself aligned by virtue of his position as substantive Governor on the side of the Colonial Office against the dilution of the Crown colony system of government which the Chambers and Mary Kingsley were demanding. However, unlike Cardew, he avoided involvement in public controversy with the Chambers. At his departure from Liverpool for Freetown, he had been submitted to the usual flattering treatment accorded to governors passing through that hub of west African trade, first at a dinner presided over by Alfred Jones (chairman of the Liverpool Chamber and of Elder, Dempster, the largest company trading to Sierra Leone) and then at a civic reception. But he had disliked the “kow-towing” of the traders and thereafter scrupulously avoided any appearance of indebtedness to them, even paying out of his own pocket for “business” dinners whenever he passed through Liverpool.

In Sierra Leone Nathan carefully refrained from showing favour to the Chambers or to Elder, Dempster, treating their requests for special treatment strictly on merit. Despite this impartiality, the British merchants regarded Nathan as infinitely preferable to Cardew. In August the Liverpool and Manchester Chambers jointly
resolved to approach Chamberlain with a request that Nathan be allowed to remain in Sierra Leone, “... as his administration is considered very favourably by those interested in the trade of the colony”. They cautioned Chamberlain that Cardew’s reinstatement was “inadvisable ... owing to the feeling that exists in Sierra Leone”. Although Chamberlain and his Colonial Office staff would have nothing to do with dictation by the Chambers, Cardew obviously suspected that Nathan was privy to a plot to supersede him, even after his return to Sierra Leone had been announced. Cardew had visited Mary Kingsley several times while he was in London in an attempt to thrash out their differences in private and he had probably picked up from her some early hint of the Chambers’ designs.

Chamberlain privately recognized Nathan’s innocence but the Colonial Office’s formal letter of appreciation merely thanked him for services “at a time of difficulty” and for the “ability and discretion with which he had carried on the government”. Although he did not comment on this cold comfort, Nathan must have been worried about his future. With only a little over six months remaining of his term as secretary of the Colonial Defence Committee, and having tasted vice-regal powers in Sierra Leone, he naturally hoped to settle for nothing less than a governorship. Just before leaving Freetown he wrote to one of the District Commissioners that he did not expect to be appointed as Cardew’s eventual successor: “On the whole I think I should rather not though I should certainly do so if I were asked to”.

In mid-1900 rumours were circulating that Nathan would take over from Cardew, whose term was about to end, and they were picked up by the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and even the Paris newspaper Le Temps. Nathan displayed no disappointment when the post went instead to Sir Charles King-Harman, a career colonial servant, but he must have felt that he was being passed over because his Protectorate despatches displayed less “discretion” than the Colonial Office expected in a potential governor. Though unstated, the lesson was obvious, for Cardew had fallen into permanent disfavour, in spite of his largely symbolic reinstatement, because of his dogged pursuit of a private vision, while the Boer War, which broke out as Nathan left Sierra Leone, was a dramatic reminder to colonial governors of the embarrassment which could arise from excessive zeal in the imperial cause. Thus Nathan took from his brief experience of Colonial Office priorities in Sierra Leone a guide to his future behaviour. Though he did not expatiate on this in his official or private correspondence, he settled on a conception of a colonial
governor's role as that of a functionary, a link in a chain rather than a driving force, most valuable when alert to the directional tug from above and likely to destroy not only the collective effort but also his own interests when pulling at a tangent.

At the War Office in the last months of 1899 and the first half of 1900, Nathan was immersed in the volume of Colonial Defence Committee work thrown up by the Boer War, with its far-reaching implications for colonial garrisons suddenly thought to be under threat from Germany or other continental powers which might seize on Britain's distraction to test the empire's strength. Only once, when the Colonial Office consulted him on the wisdom of withdrawing troops from garrison duty for deployment against the Ashanti, was his attention momentarily drawn again to west Africa. But this Ashanti sideshow, which began in April, presented Nathan with his entree into the colonial service. Immeasurably more embarrassing for Chamberlain and the Unionist government than the Sierra Leone rebellion, the Ashanti raising coincided with the great crisis of British prestige in southern Africa. Therefore the situation in the Gold Coast called for an administrator who had thoroughly imbibed the current Colonial Office doctrine on unspectacular and parsimonious government.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Though the Chalmers report and supporting evidence were not printed for Parliament until July 1899, Chamberlain was informed of its content by January and received Cardew's reply on 2 May; see Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, LX (1899), C.9388 (the report and Cardew's reply) and C.9391 (evidence and supporting documents). The quotations are from C.9388, pp. 73, 75.
5. Ms N. 274, Nathan's notes of an interview with Chamberlain, 6 March 1899. On the failure of earlier attempts to require the Creoles to pay an equivalent tax, see N.A. Cox-George, "Direct Taxation in the Early History of Sierra Leone", Sierra Leone Studies, New Series No. 5 (Dec., 1955), pp. 20-35.
6. See her Travels in West Africa (1897; 3d ed., London, 1964), which first brought her into public prominence as a critic of the Crown Colony system of government and as a defender of the maligned west coast trading concerns.
7. Mary Kingsley's letters to Nathan are in Ms. N. 133; the quotation is from her letter of 8 March 1899.
8. This is the conclusion of Cecil Howard, Mary Kingsley (London, 1957), p. 216.
Another biographer who was also her close friend, is more cautious in his assessment of the relationship but affirms that she felt towards Nathan a rare affection which may have stemmed from an attraction towards Jews; see Stephen Gwynn, *The Life of Marc Kingsley* (London, 1933), p. 216.

9. Ms N. 274, Nathan's notes headed "My opinion of the hut tax before seeing Sir F. Cardew", n.d. [ca. 18 March], written aboard the ship to Freetown, 1899.


12. Ms. N. 113, N. to mother, March 27; Ms. N. 250, N. to Chamberlain, private, 1 April 1899.

13. Ms. N. 248, 1 April 1899.


15. Nathan's letter to Chamberlain, 1 April 1899, is in Ms. N. 250. On Parkes's 1897 recommendation of "a rough and ready tribute" and the Colonial Office decision on Nathan's advice in 1899 not to impose such an irregular tax, see J.D. Hargreaves, "The Evolution of the Native Affairs Department", *Sierra Leone Studies*, New Series No. 3 (Dec., 1954), p. 183.

16. Ms. N. 248, Dr Thomas Hood to N., 14 June 1899.

17. C.O. 267/447, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 21 June, and C.O. 267/451, N. to Selborne, 14 Nov. 1899. It is interesting to contrast Nathan's criticism of Cardew's "revengeful attitude" with his own decision to deport (with Bai Bureh, the Temne war leader) two southern chiefs guilty at worst of incitement, because he "... feared their influence"; see La Ray Denzer and Michael Crowder, "Bai Bureh and the Sierra Leone Hut Tax War of 1898", in Robert J. Rotberg and Ali A. Mazrui (eds), *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York, 1970), p. 211.


21. Ibid, pp. 606-607, where Fyfe discusses the delay in implementing the Assistant D.C.'s Ordinance (No. 1 of 1897). Nathan's support for the scheme is in Ms. N. 250, N. to Cardew, 24 April; C.O. 267/446, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 26 April; and S.L.A., M.P. 1538, N. to Gore, 22 Sept. 1899.

22. Nathan's account of the riots is in Ms. N. 34 (diary), June 10-18; Ms. N. 113, N. to Miriam Nathan, 14 June; and C.O. 267/446, N. to Chamberlain, 14 June 1899. His exchanges with the local regimental commanders are in S.L.A., Local Confidential Letters, 1899, June 11-12.


24. *Sierra Leone Times* and *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 17 June 1899.

25. Ms. N. 248, 1 April 1899.


29. C.O. 270/38, Legislative Council minutes, 12 Sept. 1899.

30. See Nathan's oblique reference to this conflict in the report of a dance celebrating Hebron's appointment to the Legislative Council, *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 22 April, 1899.

31. Hebron had been a prominent member of the Central Political Medium, a league of shopkeepers which had united in opposition to an 1890 attempt to impose a tariff (Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone*, p. 495).
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

32. C.O. 270/38, Legislative Council minutes, 9 Oct. 1899. The Ordinance (No. 23 of 1899) is in C.O. 269/5. Nathan signed it into law on 13 Oct., three days before his departure.

33. Sierra Leone Times, 21 Oct. 1899, described the ordinance as "unduly rigorous".

34. See Leo Spitzer, "The Mosquito and Segregation in Sierra Leone", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 11, 1 (Spring, 1968), 49-61.


36. Ms. N. 113, N. to Miriam Nathan, 30 April 1899. Nathan's views on the C.M.S. converts are deduced from Ms. N. 249, Rev. E.H. Elwin to N., 18 Oct. 1899, in which the missionary defended his flock against Nathan's views, expressed in a private letter which is not in the Nathan Papers.


38. Blyden's letters to Nathan, 13 May-13 Aug. 1899, are in Miss. N. 248 and 250; Nathan's official remarks on Moslem education are in his despatches of 23 May (C.O. 267/446), 2 Oct. (C.O. 267/448), and in S.L.A., M.P. 1646, 19 Sept. 1899. Cardew's acceptance of the scheme is mentioned, with some surprise, by Frederick A. Millar, the Governor's Clerk, in his letters to Nathan, 28 Oct. and 15 Nov. 1899 (Ms. N. 249). On Nathan's efforts for the Moslem schools, see D.L. Sumner, Education in Sierra Leone (Freetown, 1963), p. 125.

39. Ms. N. 133, Mary Kingsley to N., 23 Feb. 1899, enclosing a letter she had received from Ralph Benson, who worked briefly at the College as a lay teacher in 1899.


41. Nathan's early musings on this scheme are in Ms. N. 113, N. to Miriam Nathan, 16 March and in Ms. N. 274, a draft headed "Cooperation of the Chambers of Commerce in the Government", n.d. [ca. May, 1899].

42. C.O. 270/37, Executive Council minutes, 20 April 1899.

43. But cf. his plan to consult the Chambers in advance on Gold Coast legislation affecting their interests, Chapter 3 p. 82.

44. Ms. N. 113, N. to mother, 11 March; C.O. 267/446, N. to Chamberlain, 19 May 1899. See also Ms. N. 293, John Holt (chairman of the Liverpool Chamber's African section) to N., 16 and 20 Nov. 1900.

45. C.O. 267/446, N. to Chamberlain, 19 May (warning that the Chambers' demand for rebuilding of a bonded warehouse would strain the colony's finances), and 16 June (opposing Elder, Dempster's request for a licence to export Sierra Leone labour to the Congo).


49. C.O. 267/451, minutes by Antrobus (7 Nov.) and Chamberlain (8 Nov.) on Cardew to Antrobus, private, 30 Oct. and Chamberlain to N., 18 Nov. 1899.


51. Le Temps, 8 May, in Nathan family book of newspaper clippings; Ms. N. 293, exchange of letters between Nathan and the secretary of the Liverpool Chamber's African Trade Section, 11 and 15 June, 1900.

52. Ms. N. 293, Antrobus to N., 14 June 1900.
"the good public servant of the state"

The temporizing nature of British colonial policy at the end of the nineteenth century is amply illustrated by events in Ashanti in the five years before Nathan's appointment as Governor of the Gold Coast. A series of wars with the powerful confederacy during the century, in which Britain became embroiled as allies of the coastal Fanti peoples, culminated in 1896 in the despatch of a powerful expedition to Kumasi, the deposition of Prempeh, the Asantehene of Ashanti, and the declaration of a British protectorate over the large hinterland region controlled by the confederacy. The concept of a "protectorate", never precise in British usage, came to mean in Ashanti the advent of a Resident and a small staff whose meagre functions, in the words of a later Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, were "... breaking the power of the Coomassie [Kumasi] chiefs over the outlying tribes, keeping the trade routes open, and travelling through the country as much as possible". Even these minimal and essentially negative objectives proved unattainable for the tiny staff made available to the first Resident, Captain Donald Stewart, who found it not merely impolitic but impossible to take over at once the role of the deposed Asantehene, on whose unifying office the confederacy had rested.

There was a certain vague awareness in the Colonial Office of the instability of Ashanti sans Asantehene but it was expressed in terms of administrative inconvenience rather than of imminent menace to the loosely defined and defended British suzerainty in the area. The
solution of incorporating Ashanti in the coastal colony, formally annexed in 1874 but under British influence for much longer, was desultorily discussed but shelved for fear of constitutional difficulties. The colony's Legislative Council and Supreme Court, whose jurisdiction would extend to Ashanti if the incorporation proposal were to be followed, were accessible to the educated Africans of the coast as arenas in which to exercise influence on the colonial government. Consequently, the Colonial Office preferred to see Ashanti under untrammeled British rule. Accordingly, an Order-in-Council was drafted for the annexation of Ashanti, leaving open the precise status of the region but allowing for the imposition of a direct tax such as the colonial government had been unable to impose on the coast over the effective opposition of the small but vocal group of educated Africans in the Colony.

The Governor, Sir Frederic Hodgson, left the colony's headquarters at Accra for the Ashanti capital at Kumasi in March of 1900 to explain the British decision to the Ashanti chiefs. Hodgson's announcements were doubly distasteful to the Ashanti, for not only was the "indemnity tax" (which he described as interest on the expenses of two costly expeditions in 1874 and 1896) a transparent device to institute a permanent impost but the news of annexation clearly indicated that Britain would not meet Ashanti demands for the repatriation of Prempeh. Despite long and informed research based on a study of Ashanti institutions and oral tradition, it remains a controversial question whether these announcements alone would have sufficed to stir the Ashanti to rebellion, or whether Hodgson's demand to be seated on the Golden Stool, revered symbol of Ashanti nationhood, touched off the outbreak of hostilities. Whatever the degree of Hodgson's culpability, and certainly the demand for the Stool was not authorized by Chamberlain or the Colonial Office in advance, the Governor's reputation with his London masters fell to zero when he was besieged in the fort at Kumasi by powerful Ashanti forces and out of touch with the outside world for almost two months. Shades of Gordon at Khartoum stirred the Unionist government to action but the disasters for British arms in South Africa precluded any repetition of the massive Sudan expedition of fifteen years earlier. The solution was found in the last telegram Hodgson got through from Kumasi, before the lines were cut, requesting the aid of African troops from Northern Nigeria, where Lugard had created an efficient force to conquer the Moslem emirates. Hodgson was to be extricated by black troops led by white officers, an embarrassing situation made more damaging to
Hodgson's standing at the Colonial Office by its contrast with Cardew's success in suppressing the Sierra Leone rising two years before without assistance from other west African colonies.

Decency demanded that no action be taken to replace Hodgson until July, when he emerged unscathed on the coast before the expedition led by Colonel James Willcocks could fight its way into Kumasi to rescue him. Although in March Chamberlain had defended Hodgson’s actions during a Commons debate, he later decided that the Governor's ineptitude made it imperative that he should be removed as soon as his safety was assured. On 25 July, Nathan was summoned to the Colonial Office and offered Hodgson's job, not temporarily as at the time of Cardew's similar moment of crisis in Sierra Leone but as substantive Governor of the Gold Coast. Nathan accepted on the spot, whatever disappointment he may have felt at not being chosen to return to Freetown fully assuaged by the fact that, measured by the salary and allowances of the post, the Gold Coast was, with Lagos, the most prestigious of west African governorships at the turn of the twentieth century.

At the time of his temporary posting to Sierra Leone Nathan's briefing was understandably sketchy but the lack of official direction offered to him before he left for the substantive Gold Coast appointment betrayed a continuing poverty of ideas at the top about what to do with west Africa. The permanent Colonial Office staff could do no better than to direct Nathan to the recent Gold Coast correspondence for guidance and even Chamberlain had few clear opinions on policy. Nathan’s notes of his discussion with the Secretary of State contain little more than appears in his laconic diary entry: “... interview with Mr Chamberlain (gold, health, morality).” Under the latter two rubrics Chamberlain’s remarks were mere pious exhortations that Nathan should try to improve the Gold Coast's dubious record, though he implied a willingness to support Nathan if he decided that only strong legislation could hasten a brighter day of clear drains and clean minds for the European population. On the subject of gold, Chamberlain was more direct: the Gold Coast was to pay its own administrative expenses from a tax on the gold mines at Tarkwa and Obuasi, which were to be served by a railway already under construction at the colonial government’s expense.

The three issues Chamberlain chose to raise were those which past experience had shown to be likely sources of embarrassment with the Treasury or with the Chambers of Commerce. On the future problem of what to do with Ashanti and the Northern Territories, he
THE GOLD COAST 1901
had nothing to say. With no pending investigation to hide behind, as there had been in the case of Sierra Leone, Chamberlain’s silence was probably the result of a realization that the best, or perhaps merely the least troublesome, judges of local policy were the men on the spot, the governor and his advisers.

Consequently Nathan, knowing nothing at first hand of the Gold Coast colony or of the troubled hinterland behind, it seemed to be free to cut a policy from whole cloth, with Chamberlain and the Colonial Office able to support or disown him as they chose. Nathan’s information about the Gold Coast had to be garnered from an assortment of old Gold Coast hands whom he sought out, among them Sir Frederic Hodgson on leave in London before going on to the quiet backwater governorship of Barbados. Naturally, under the circumstances, Hodgson confined his advice to remarks about the colony proper and refrained entirely from comment on Ashanti.

Although the official sources of advice were cautious to the point of obstructiveness in Nathan’s attempts to test the direction of the wind in Whitehall, the Chambers of Commerce were even freer with unsolicited guidance than they had been when Nathan was setting out to Sierra Leone as acting governor. Although he refused the Liverpool Chamber’s offer to pay the expenses of a private dinner at which he met the most prominent west African merchants, he could not escape the experience, to which all new governors in west Africa were submitted, of a formal reception at which six members of the Chamber extolled his virtues at length and expounded the benefits which would accrue to a governor who took the trading interests into his confidence. But they were no longer preaching to a promising candidate for the role of merchants’ governor; though he replied warily that he shared the Chamber’s concern for the prosperity of the Gold Coast, he showed in his remarks that he had overcome his earlier temptation to include traders directly in the government and was leaning towards the attitude evolving in the Colonial Office, namely to treat the Chambers’ requests civilly but to keep them at a full arm’s length from the realm of policy-making.

Except for this still half-formed resolution, Nathan was a governor without a policy when he reached Accra on 17 December 1900, after a brief sojourn in Freetown at which he saw Sir Charles King-Harman sworn in as Cardew’s successor and so severed his own links with the west African colony in which he had cut his teeth both as a practical engineer and as a fledgling colonial servant. The Gold Coast offered not only more money but potentially more opportunity for initiative than Sierra Leone, its future administration set-
tled by 1900 along lines hammered out in a Royal Commission and Chamberlain's subsequent instructions to the Governor. Succeeding a Gold Coast Governor whose policies had brought him into discredit, Nathan was confronted by the twin tasks of formalizing administration over a vast hinterland in Ashanti and the Northern Territories and of restoring to a sound footing the economy of the region, disrupted by the rebellion and showing signs of a dangerous and artificial speculative boom based on the still undeveloped gold resources which gave the colony its name. For a man of imaginative ideas and the staff to put them into practice, the Gold Coast presented a chance not merely of entrenching himself in a new career but of leaving his mark on the history of a colony whose economic potential might make it a model for the self-supporting principles which Chamberlain advocated for the tropical empire.

Nathan quickly discovered that the quality and morale of the colony's administrative staff were as low as that of Sierra Leone, and made worse by the temptations to indulge in minor corruption or to resign precipitately from the colonial service as gold mining companies tried to recruit men with local experience for concession-hunting and site development. Petty feuds, drunkenness and what was euphemistically labelled "immorality" (that is, consorting with African women) were commonplace. Almost every month in the year after his arrival, Nathan heard Executive Council charges against colonial service officers and he took a particularly strong line against those suspected of trafficking in gold shares, declaring, despite the fact that the conditions of service in the Gold Coast did not then specifically forbid such speculation, that he would be "pitiless" towards those who took advantage of their inside knowledge to make a killing on the market. For Nathan, such behaviour amounted to disloyalty, an offence even worse in his code of behaviour than the "immorality" Chamberlain had enjoined him to stamp out.

Whether Nathan's campaign raised the morals of the service or simply made officials more circumspect in their peccadilloes, there was by the end of 1901 a marked decline in the incidence of Executive Council charges against employees. The feuds between officials were harder to stop. One of the worst offenders, as Nathan quickly discovered, was his most senior assistant, the Colonial Secretary William Low. Nominally in charge of day-to-day dealings between the Accra Secretariat and district officials, but in fact at loggerheads with most of his subordinates, Low had been on such bad terms with Nathan's predecessor that in practice Hodgson, like
Cardew in Sierra Leone, had acted as his own Colonial Secretary, controlling not only policy matters but also personally supervising the details of clerical work in the Secretariat. Nathan had been warned from two sources about Low; his half-brother Nathaniel Nathan, who had known Low in the West Indies, suspected him of "duplicity" towards his superiors and Gore, the Sierra Leone Colonial Secretary, wrote that Low had "... rather a weird reputation with regard to young girls". At first Nathan viewed Low as an object of pity, "played out" by long service in tropical climates but clinging to office in order to qualify for a full pension on retirement. Eventually Nathan grew to recognize the depth of hostility towards the Colonial Secretary among junior officials and began to fear that Low might "... let me in by his blunders". Consequently, he set about working Low out of the service in order to replace him with his own nominee. This proved to be a long process, for Low was not eligible for a full pension if he resigned prematurely and he hung on tenaciously even when Nathan’s tone became peremptory; in a private note more appropriate as a rebuke to a callow cadet than as an instruction to an experienced officer, Nathan returned a file to Low with the demand that it "... may at once be put into reasonable order" and continued:14

There is no single minute and least of all yours of the 17th Jan. 1901 from which I can get the information called for. I do not object to having to read through a properly kept minute paper but I do most strongly to having first to put the papers in order.

Despite reprimands of this kind, Low lingered for almost a year after Nathan’s arrival but at last resigned in despair. Nathan remarked to the Colonial Office that Low was neither young enough, nor enough of a "gentleman", to be retained in his responsible position, and the C.O. agreed, though Antrobus noted that his successor, whom Nathan named, was exceptionally unfamiliar with colonial service procedure and thought the appointment smacked somewhat of jobbery.15 Captain L.R.S. Arthur, a military officer who had become a consul in the Congo and then in French West Africa after accompanying the Portal mission to Uganda in 1892, had met Nathan in Sierra Leone in 1899 when he came down to Freetown to assist in the enquiry which Nathan conducted on Sierra Leone’s loss of the “northern rivers” trade to French Guinea. Apparently impressed by the young consul’s gravity of manner and his knowledge of west Africa, Nathan was even more struck by Arthur’s qualifications as a "gentleman", for he had attended Eton and, like Nathan’s
private secretary Edward A. Fitzgerald, (a Cambridge graduate) possessed the social cachet which Nathan craved. In office, Arthur proved to be a model subordinate, once summing up his philosophy when acting as Governor while Nathan was on leave as "... keeping away from anything which would upset [Nathan’s] views and policy", and Nathan declared himself delighted with his choice. At this stage of his career as a governor, anxious to obscure his own inexperience, Nathan sought an assistant who was a mere foil, though the device was short-lived, for Arthur succumbed within two years to the notorious Gold Coast fever and was replaced by Major Herbert Bryan, a soldier with substantial west African experience, whom the Colonial Office appointed in preference to Nathan’s nominee.

This minor intrigue casts light on Nathan’s nature, which could prove unexpectedly ruthless when his own reputation for efficiency was at stake. One of the younger Gold Coast officials, a Cambridge graduate selected from the Customs Service for appointment to responsible positions as acting Secretary of Native Affairs and as a Travelling Commissioner during Nathan’s term in the Gold Coast, discovered this side of Nathan’s character when he moved from the freedom of touring in the hinterland to administrative work under Nathan’s eye at headquarters. When Nathan’s appointment was announced in 1900, T.E. Fell wrote home that "... everyone who knows about him speaks well of him and we are looking forward to his arrival" and, after working with Nathan for a short time at Accra, described him as "an extremely nice man". But a year later, Fell’s opinion had altered radically:

We seem to do a lot of work, too much, and never get ahead, and it angers me sometimes to see a Governor who won’t ever let well alone but wants to do something better which usually turns out worse.

This persistence and the hard driving of his staff, ironical when it is remembered that twenty years earlier Nathan had condemned Sir Samuel Rowe in Sierra Leone for the same behaviour, stemmed from Nathan’s determination to carry out Chamberlain’s brief and to show himself capable of decisive and uncompromising leadership. But he was equally capable of vacillation, for example when he first advised Chamberlain that a subsidiary white metal currency should be introduced in west Africa and then reversed his position after consulting the local Chambers of Commerce, concluding that "... on the whole I think it is wiser to leave matters, for any rate at the present, as they are".

A similar bowing to expediency is apparent in Nathan’s handling
of a scheme to reorganize the Gold Coast administrative service, a plan which, with his efforts to introduce systematic government of Ashanti and the Northern Territories, he regarded as his major achievement in the colony. Shortage of personnel because of the Boer War combined with the Gold Coast’s reputation as a part of the “White Man’s Grave” and the enticement of officials into the employment of mining companies to persuade Nathan that a root-and-crop reorganization of the service was needed, but he was hampered by the colony’s inability to pay better salaries to attract men of high calibre. His army background and knowledge of the Indian Civil Service promotion methods resulted in an elaborate scheme which would allow an official to move with an almost military predictability from the lowest to the relatively senior ranks of the Gold Coast service. Entering as a cadet in the Accra Secretariat, a young man was to move to the field as an assistant district commissioner (a post Nathan proposed to create on the pattern of his Sierra Leone recommendation) and then to alternate between the districts and headquarters as district officer and ultimately as assistant colonial secretary. Thereafter promotion would be on merit alone.^^

The Colonial Office reaction to this elaborate attempt to inject an artificial esprit de corps into the Gold Coast service illustrates the lack of genuine communication which marked several of Nathan’s early efforts to innovate. Ever anxious to avoid the appearance of governing from Downing Street, the senior C.O. officials in charge of west African affairs minuted their scepticism about the prospects of Nathan’s mechanistic scheme, given the west coast climate and the necessity of transferring officials from one colony to another, but they gave Nathan no inkling of their doubts.^^ He was therefore left to muddle on for two years before concluding that his plan was impracticable, the final disillusionment coming at the time of Arthur’s death, when his logical replacement, the senior district commissioner L.N. Peregrine, had to be passed over as unsuitable.^^ At this setback, Nathan threw out his proposal completely, abolishing the cadet system because the candidates it had produced were not even a pale reflection of their Indian Civil Service counterparts, and reverting to the old west African practice of throwing newcomers into the field, on the assumption that deep water was the best test of a capacity to float.

Before his idealism evaporated entirely, Nathan made another attempt to lift the loyalty and efficiency of the administrative service, using example where precept had failed. Considering a lack of con-
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

tinity the service's most grievous failing, Nathan attempted to demonstrate that six months' leave after a year's service was excessive. He postponed his first leave, setting his sights on sixteen months of continuous service and, when his health stood the test, lifting his aspirations to two full years. His subordinates marvelled, one of them writing home: "The Governor is still out and seems likely to stay two years on a stretch", but they did not imitate the example, which failed ignominiously when, after seventeen months, Nathan came down with fever and had to go on leave at short notice. To underline the ineffectiveness of his self-denial, he received a letter in England from the Chief Justice pleading on behalf of colonial officers that the existing conditions of leave be retained.

Nathan's ultimate solution to the problem of encouraging administrators to overstay their minimum tours of duty was more successful because it rested on a realistic assessment of human nature. While he could not at once increase salaries Nathan contrived to appeal to officials' self-interest by designating as a "duty allowance" twenty per cent of all salaries, this amount to be paid to the officer actually performing a particular function or to his temporary replacement. This was accompanied by what Nathan disingenuously called a salary increase for district commissioners but was in fact no more than the inclusion in their salaries of travelling allowances hitherto paid only when they were on tour in their districts. The D.C.'s protested so strenuously against this attack on their perquisites of office that Nathan gave in, restoring the touring allowance while retaining the newly "increased" salaries. Thus, for the more senior posts, Nathan came around in the end to a policy which, if the Colonial Office had been more candid, he might have adopted at the outset, avoiding the ignominy of a retreat from his naive ideals. Conceivably too, he might have seemed less censorious about the behaviour of his subordinates if he had appeared early in his administration to have their interests at heart.

Although he had little success in creating a Gold Coast civil service which would bear comparison with the "heaven-born" officers in India whom he admired, Nathan performed well in the more impersonal field of bureaucratic reform. He inherited a system of administration based on fourteen districts in the coastal Colony and Ashanti, controlled by commissioners "... mostly very inexperienced and in constant telegraphic communication with the Secretariat". He added a fifteenth, Sekuri—Upper Denkera on the southwest flank of Ashanti, and proceeded to amalgamate the old and smaller "districts" into three regions, each to be called a District with a
District Commissioner and five Assistant D.C.’s under his supervision. Only the D.C. was to be in the channel of direct communication with Accra, his assistants reporting to him. The apparent demotion implied in the new title of Assistant District Commissioner proved as unpopular as the abolition of travelling allowances and Nathan again succumbed, changing the nomenclature to leave the D.C.’s their former names and designating the new regional heads as Provincial Commissioners. While Nathan acknowledged no model, the Colonial Office noted here, as in the case of his promotion scheme, a close similarity to the system already introduced by Sir Ralph Moor in Southern Nigeria, except that there the larger administrative areas were labelled “Divisions”. Nathan was concerned, not with precedent, but with the creation of an administrative hierarchy like that of the army, with clearly established channels of command, and by the time he left the Gold Coast he was able to report that the system had operated for a full year to his entire satisfaction.  

The decentralizing tendencies of this reorganization are important because they are in such marked contrast to the philosophy which Nathan brought to the creation of an administration for the Northern Territories and the reform of that in Ashanti where, in practice if not on paper, the government was to be both more centralized than Nathan fully recognized when he included that area in his “Provinces”, and more “direct” in intention than subsequent scholars examining his innovations have concluded. But for Nathan, the implementation of new administrations in the hinterland had to wait, as in Sierra Leone, until he had dealt with the more pressing matters of the coastal Colony. In arriving at this assessment of priorities, apparently out of keeping with the post-rebellion instability of Ashanti, he had little choice, for the inexorable timetable of colonial procedure required him, arriving at the end of a financial year, to set to work at once on the financial estimates for 1901. He received no sympathy from the Colonial Office when he complained that, in effect, this meant that he had to draw up within weeks of his arrival a general policy for his administration while looking over his shoulder for signs of trouble in Ashanti. The Colonial Office accepted the assurances of Willcocks, commander of the Ashanti expedition, that the confederacy’s power had been shattered for all time. Nathan was sceptical of this assertion and decided to play safe by increasing the vote for the Gold Coast’s military forces. Chamberlain reluctantly bowed to Nathan’s “expert opinion” on colonial defence, although he had not at this point
visited Ashanti. The nagging fear of a fresh outbreak, which might deal his career a blow as damaging as that which Hodgson had suffered, persisted throughout Nathan’s term in the Gold Coast and, for this slender reason, the colony’s economy was saddled with an additional annual expense of more than £50,000.28

Though the cost of ensuring Ashanti submissiveness was not the sole determinant, Nathan’s estimates were based on a set of priorities which consistently placed order before development. After the enforcement of order he ranked the establishment of administrations in Ashanti and the Northern Territories—the civil wing of the peacekeeping agencies—and only then did he turn to finding the money to complete the railway from Sekondi to Kumasi, to start a survey to speed the confirmation of gold mining concessions, and to improve communications, including roads and telegraphs. Thus, the tone of Nathan’s entire administration of the Gold Coast was anticipated in the peroration of his address to the Legislative Council introducing the 1901 estimates: “I intend to scrutinize most carefully expenditure under all heads of the estimates with a view to keeping down as much as possible the ordinary costs of administration and in this I rely on the cooperation of all the heads of departments”.29

Clearly Nathan had grasped the essence of success for a new governor in the consolidation phase of British colonial administration: zealous avoidance of unnecessary expense and of trouble with the natives. But in the speech on the estimates he made one remark in passing which has recently earned him the approbation of a scholar analyzing the economy of the Gold Coast during this phase. Referring to the pivotal condition the economy had reached, with Ashanti bowed if not beaten and the mining industry poised for rapid growth, Nathan went on:

It appears to me that the important changes through which the country is passing … cannot but tend to redistribute the weights of the various parts of the Colony, and to shift its centre of gravity.

While the imagery is that of the engineer, the implicit call for a wait-and-see policy on public investment in this assessment has been called “… quite a sophisticated statement in capital theory”.30 Apart from the anachronism of attributing to Nathan, untutored even in the elements of economics, any awareness of theory at such a rarefied level, this judgement leaves a false impression of his reasons for restraining the use of public money on development. The centre of gravity to which he was referring was a military rather than an economic one, requiring the extension of the railway to Kumasi not
basically in order to tap that area’s known rubber and potential cocoa resources but to provide rapid transport for troops in case of a new rising. His speech on the estimates was full of hesitant phrases, in addition to the one quoted above about scrutinizing the costs of ordinary administration; he would “proceed cautiously” on proposals to build roads, to develop cotton production, to open the Volta River to navigation, and even to encourage cocoa cultivation. “I am disposed to proceed with caution” was his own characterization of his policy on the economic front in general, and his remark on saving public funds for fear that any works on which they were spent might become redundant must be seen in this light.

A new and massive call on those funds was one of Chamberlain’s unwelcome revelations just as Nathan had begun to husband his meagre revenue resources. This shattering blow, reinforcing Nathan’s natural timidity on the question of development, followed the submission of the 1901 estimates to London. Pressed in the Commons to defend the expenditure on pacifying the west African colonies, Chamberlain issued the pronouncement that the imperial “grants” to the Gold Coast, approaching £500,000, for the Ashanti expedition were “... properly speaking, a loan”. The Colonial Office also secured Chamberlain’s approval, urged on by the other west African governors, that the cost of sending troops to the Gold Coast from nearby colonies must be repaid. This was an unprecedented decision, amounting to an insistence that even rebellions in ill-defined protectorates, such as Ashanti had been in 1900, were the responsibility of the neighbouring colony, and Nathan had made no provision in the 1901 estimates for an instalment on these debts.

Chamberlain delivered the first blow in April, noting that the estimates allowed for a large surplus and instructing Nathan “... to pay off as rapidly as possible the debt to the Imperial Government”, beginning with “a considerable payment” in 1902. As if this was not a sufficient setback, Nathan did not hear until November that he would also have to pay off the other colonies and in a private letter he expressed his bitter disappointment, for the decision “... upsets my financial schemes and annoys me intensely”. He resorted to delaying tactics, reminding the Colonial Office annually that the Gold Coast’s capital was tied up in vital railway construction, rehearsing his fears of an Ashanti revival and successfully postponing repayment of the debt to the imperial exchequer until he had left the colony. But he could not so easily silence the demands of the other colonies; Sierra Leone, Lagos and Southern Nigeria were repaid in full, though Nathan rejected as excessive Lugard’s claims
for Northern Nigeria and it was left for Nathan's successor to work out a compromise.  

Against this background of crippling long-term burdens on revenue, Nathan's caution in devising a financial policy at the beginning of his administration proved a fortunate, if essentially accidental, decision, keeping the colony solvent and his own reputation untarnished. But the consequences for the future of the Gold Coast were less advantageous, for the crucial objectives of economic development and effective administration were postponed during Nathan's term of office. He was obliged to find palliatives, however tentative his shortage of money and his temperament might make them, and such was the inertia of colonial policy in the consolidation period that some of his devices, lacking the systematic rationalization which Lugard furnished for similar expedients in Northern Nigeria, hardened nevertheless into articles of Gold Coast faith.

The most striking Gold Coast inheritance from Nathan's administration was its uniform freedom from direct taxation. By the time a tax was at last imposed in the exceptional conditions of the second world war, the entire region of the Gold Coast and the peninsular colony of Sierra Leone had long been the only British Crown colonies in which no direct tax was collected. The origins of this immunity lay deep in the mid-nineteenth century, when an educated African section in the old coastal towns of the coastal enclaves had successfully organized to resist a tax, first in Freetown and later in Cape Coast and Accra. But the testing time for the tax in both colonies was that at which Nathan chanced to be in office, just after the annexation of the hinterland where there was no African elite of the coastal kind to organize constitutional protest against a direct tax. In the Sierra Leone Protectorate and in Ashanti, rebellions ostensibly directed against a tax had been put down just before Nathan's arrival. In Sierra Leone, Nathan was saved from the need to make a decision on the future of the tax by Chamberlain's prejudging of the issue but in the Gold Coast it was left squarely for him to decide. The manner in which he reached his decision illuminates not only Nathan's character and ambition but the circumstances facing many governors like him in the era after annexation. It was a question of priorities: which came first—one's own career, the welfare of the newly annexed territory, or the will of the imperial government? For a new governor, it was a particularly difficult choice.

In view of this difficulty, Nathan's hesitation in coming to a decision appears as prudence rather than procrastination. Before he got
away from Accra to see Kumasi at first hand, he exchanged a series of what he called “demi-official” letters with the Ashanti Resident, Captain Donald Stewart, who had been at Kumasi, except for some fortunately timed leave in 1900, since the deposition of the Asantehene in 1896. As a former officer in the 92nd Gordon Highlanders, Stewart reinforced his taciturnity as a Scot with the dislike for desk work of an infantry officer who had field experience in Afghanistan, the Transvaal and the Sudan. Nathan found him a reluctant correspondent but listened with great attention to Stewart’s infrequent advice. Absolved by his absence on leave from direct complicity in Hodgson’s Golden Stool blunder, Stewart tended to place all blame for the uprising on this *faux pas* and to imply that now he was back at his post all was peaceful in Ashanti. But he was too cautious to advocate continuation of the pre-war policy of collecting a tax, disguised as an indemnity. In 1898 Stewart had pressed for such a tax, assuring Hodgson that it could be safely collected; three years later, having witnessed from afar the events of 1900, he advised against it. The tax, he told Nathan, was being unfairly collected by the chiefs. He pointed to the example of one chief who had collected the full assessment but had used some of the return to pay his private debts: “Now of course he will have to send another whip around and the people will think that the Government ordered it”. On these pragmatic grounds rather than on the justice of a tax in principle, Stewart pleaded for abolition.

Nathan took Stewart’s advice, even before he saw Ashanti for himself. He proposed to Chamberlain that Stewart’s counsel be accepted but Chamberlain ordered that “... a hint be given to Major Nathan ... that I think the abolition of the tribute demanded would injure our prestige. The mode of collection—and the terms—might be left to his discretion”. Nathan and Stewart were in a cleft stick; for the stability of Ashanti, and so for the future of their own careers, they felt that abolition of the tax was vital but Chamberlain was more concerned with Britain’s reputation than with local considerations. They cast about for a way out of their dilemma, both in correspondence and in conversation during Nathan’s visit to Kumasi in March and April of 1901. Their recommendation was a compromise: the “tribute” should be collected in full in 1901, in part in the following year and then abolished. Nathan put this proposal to the Colonial Office hesitantly, obviously fearing that this time Chamberlain would refuse to take the advice of the man on the spot. Taking a line from Chamberlain’s “hint”, he emphasized the symbolic significance of collecting the tax in the current year, as proof
that the British will could be imposed on the Ashanti, but suggested that continuing the collection might cause factions to form around the disaffected chiefs. To his surprise and relief, Chamberlain gave in without a murmur, authorizing Nathan to drop the tax if he thought it advisable.  

Immunity from direct taxation became universal throughout the Gold Coast when the "maintenance" tax in the Northern Territories was abandoned at Nathan's insistence. The arguments about this tax revealed the same confusion and disagreement as the dispute over the Ashanti "indemnity" tax. Whereas Stewart had first recommended that a tax could be easily collected and had then altered his opinion, his counterparts in the Northern Territories swung in the other direction. The first Northern Territories Commissioner had no doubts about the wisdom of the tax, which he described in Lugardian terms as a symbol of British rule,  

but his successor, Major A.H. Morris, was in two minds. In 1900 he had advised Hodgson that the tax could not be safely collected and that the revenue it would bring in would not justify the risk of arousing opposition from peoples unaccustomed to the idea of a regular impost. But a year later he was following Northcott's view in declaring that "... it has been the custom of the country for a great many years to pay taxes either in kind or money to their head-chief, which appointment we are now filling, so that consequently this tax should be paid to us". Nathan responded with a demand for reassurances that this tax would not be oppressive and that the chiefs would not need a British force at their backs when they collected it. Morris took Nathan's broad hint, reporting his altered opinion that the tax might well be used by chiefs as a pretext for extortion, and recommending its abolition. With relief, Nathan approved Morris's alternative of recruiting labour for road building and urged Chamberlain to drop the maintenance tax at once. The Colonial Office had the same regrets as in the case of Ashanti but could not see its way clear to overrule Nathan.  

Obsessed with the short term preservation of order in Ashanti and the Northern Territories rather than distant prospects of developing the entire Gold Coast, Nathan had thrown his support behind the policy of financing administration from indirect taxation, an expedient which became hallowed by time into a Gold Coast dogma so inflexible that in 1919 when Britain incorporated western Togoland in the Gold Coast the head tax collected by Germany was abolished to bring the new territory into conformity.  

Nathan attributed to his clemency on tax collection the calm conditions which he found in Ashanti and the Northern Territories when
he first visited the hinterland in March and April of 1901. As in Sierra Leone the wisdom of hindsight and an atmosphere of calm reflection allowed Nathan to earn credit for putting forward the definitive contemporary analysis of a rebellion against British authority. His oft-quoted reports on the causes of the last Ashanti war rested on evidence provided by Stewart but its air of objectivity owed nothing to the Resident, who had already explained away the rising as the inevitable result of Hodgson’s rash demand for the Golden Stool. Free of any need to place blame elsewhere, Nathan probed deeper for the causes. He agreed with Stewart that Hodgson had precipitated the rebellion but he viewed this action as symptomatic of a general ignorance among British administrators about the complexities of Ashanti society.

In view of his superficial acquaintance with Ashanti and its peoples, Nathan’s insights were clearly based on intuition rather than profound investigation but he was conscious of the existence there of “... a complicated system of administration, hallowed by antiquity and historical precedents” and he was sufficiently open-minded to admit that “our ignorance and policy alike have tended to break down” this elaborate political system. Beyond this he did not see, and in practice his own policy contributed to a further erosion of the Ashanti polity, if only because he did not share Lugard’s determination to retain the keystone of the system, the Asantehene having been equivalent to the Northern Nigerian emirs in status and more vital to the stability of the structure, based as it was in Ashanti on a confederal alliance with the Asantehene as primus inter pares. Concerned with economy and the preservation of a delicately balanced peace, Nathan made no attempt to commission a thorough study of the indigenous societies such as that undertaken in the 1920s by R.S. Rattray, and he relied for information on a Native Affairs Department manned by Europeans, none of whom had even the degree of familiarity with the hinterland which the Creole J.C.E. Parkes had possessed in Sierra Leone.

Given these limitations, Nathan’s perception of Ashanti society was surprisingly accurate. He indulged in some denigration of Ashanti religion (“a deep rooted superstition”) and character (“cruel, unmerciful to his enemies, deceitful, suspicious and intemperate”) which have led later observers to categorize him with the racist rulers of the empire, but he was able to balance this view with an appreciation of Ashanti virtues as he saw them, especially their courage, dignity and commercial honesty, while also recognizing the disruptive effects on the traditional religion of the British
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

presence. Transferred from the realm of analysis to that of action, this might have led him to adopt a deliberate policy of conserving Ashanti institutions such as that which Lugard was currently working out for Northern Nigeria. But Nathan's emphasis was on the delicacy of the equipoise in Ashanti as it stood after the 1900 expedition, trembling between another outburst of hostility towards the intruder and final submission to the invader's superior forces, a situation which might be turned to the British advantage only if the government acted with a blend of restraint (for example, concerning the tax and seizure of land) and firmness on the question of punishing "disloyal" chiefs. The key to Nathan’s assessment of the Ashanti temperament was his belief that it would submit to an authority powerful enough to enforce its will, even when that will cut across custom, provided that changes were not made with the haste which had brought Cardew and Hodgson to grief.

Nathan's Ashanti policy therefore shared with the financial schemes he drew up the qualities and limitations of his temperament—prudence and vigilance, rather than the flair and originality which Lugard demonstrated in his early career. Under the Ashanti Order-in-Council of 1902 Nathan erected an administration headed by a Chief Commissioner intended to act as a white Asantehene, with full authority subject to the approval of the Governor to regulate all aspects of the subject's life but lacking both the legitimacy and the checks which custom had placed on the Asantehene's action. The chiefs, who possessed a high degree of independence in the traditional structure, were now to be liable to deposition at the will of the government, though their right to the land under their jurisdiction was assured. Facing for the first time the crucial question of traditional legitimacy in settling the fate of "disloyal" chiefs deposed after the 1900 rising, Nathan announced a policy which he later extended to the colony: candidates for chiefly rank (stools) would be submitted to election through customary procedures but, after their elevation, were to be subject to deposition ("destoolment") by the Governor if they were considered either to be disloyal or to have lost the support of their followers. This method became a fixed principle with Nathan and when succession disputes inevitably arose he fell back on assertions that the chiefs in office had been elected by "the proper people" and thereafter washed his hands of the matter.

Mixed though his motives were in retaining the chiefs, Nathan had clearly begun to develop a reasoned view of their usefulness as functionaries. In his tour through the coastal colony before going to
Ashanti he had been convinced that “old chiefs who have lost their power” were natural foci of anti-government sentiments. Recalling Chamberlain’s advice to him in 1899 to follow in the Sierra Leone Protectorate the maxim of “rule through the chiefs”, Nathan warned:

The period during which native jurisdiction is being abridged and at the same time native sources of revenue are being directed from the Chiefs to the Government must always be a difficult one to get over. ‘Rule through the Chiefs’ … is only possible to follow if we are prepared to leave the Chiefs their questionable sources of revenue and power.

Since this degree of laissez-faire was out of the question, Nathan proposed making a new generation of chiefs into labour contractors for the government and private mining contractors, with stipends to cover the loss of their traditional revenues. Chamberlain noted that this policy would accord with his view of the chiefs’ role under colonial government, a role which he interpreted as that of “intermediary between the Government and the people”. He gave a clue to his rationale for retaining the chiefs at the end of his minute: “I dread the possibility of our having, as a Government, to decide on every little question and detail without the full knowledge of persons and prejudices possessed by the Chiefs”. But he made no cavil at Nathan’s decision to destool delinquent chiefs; he wanted only to retain “the best of them”.

Nathan’s decision to preserve the office of chief in Ashanti has been described as “an empirical approach to indirect rule”. This is true only in the broadest interpretation of that notoriously imprecise term “indirect rule”. In the absence of the direct tax considered so essential by Lugard, and in the light of Nathan’s intention to depose even those chiefs elected by customary procedures if he suspected their loyalty or found them wanting as functionaries, the version of indirect rule introduced by him in Ashanti merits little credit for sympathy with traditional authorities. For Nathan, retaining the chiefs, like abolishing direct taxation, was a necessary but essentially temporary palliative which could be supplanted by a more satisfactory and rigorous form of government when peace had been guaranteed and when more European administrators were available.

Having secured Chamberlain’s approval for this very diluted form of “rule through the chiefs” in Ashanti, Nathan refrained in his despatches from emphasizing the short-term nature of the expedient. Only once did he permit this view to stray into his official reports, when he admitted that “…for the present we are not in a position to
dispose over any considerable portion of Ashanti with the assistance of these chiefs in its administration”.

Chamberlain and the Colonial Office overlooked the phrase which implied Nathan's hope that direct rule might later be imposed but in his private correspondence Nathan made it plain that this was what he intended. In Ashanti as in the coastal colony he foresaw a day when the chiefs would have outlived their value to the colonial government. Advised by the District Commissioner of Tarkwa in the western Colony of the ineffectual efforts of Kwamina Faibir of Awudua to recruit carriers for the railway, Nathan replied that he “… quite recognized the waning power of the chiefs, even if well-intentioned, to give assistance to the government” and he willingly complied with the District Commissioner's request to depose the chief.

In 1902 another but significantly different illustration of Nathan's attitude to chiefs occurred when Kofi Amoaku, head chief of Attabubu in north-eastern Ashanti, was threatened with destoolment by disaffected sub-chiefs. The acting Chief Commissioner at Kumasi vacillated over whether to support or to forbid the destoolment because the sub-chiefs had not pressed any “serious charge” and deposition “… would have had a bad effect on other chiefs and natives generally”. The charge was adultery; Nathan agreed that this might be a “frivolous” reason but added that “a chief whose people won't obey him is no use to this country or the government”. When the sub-chiefs pressed the charge Nathan immediately ordered the destoolment for fear that the chiefs' unpopularity might rub off on the government. Whether cooperative or obstructive, traditionalist or modernizing, no Gold Coast chief in trouble with his African subordinates or with his European masters could rely for protection on Nathan, for whom indirect rule was merely a way of holding the fort, not of holding with tradition.

With a new and uncertain governor in office at Accra, what has been called the “panic element” in nineteenth century British dealings with an independent Ashanti survived into the twentieth century and beyond the date of formal annexation. Having never accepted the claim of Willcocks to have crushed the Ashanti once and for all, Nathan was all the more inclined to listen to rumours of a new rising, the first of which reached him only a few days after the Sierra Leone members of the West African Regiment stationed in Kumasi had mutinied and deserted to the coast. Stewart called for reinforcements and while they were on their way north he was approached by several Ashanti chiefs who offered to lead him to the concealed Golden Stool. Stewart decided not to accept the offer but Nathan was
furious that the Chief Commissioner had so much as listened to it. Referring to his speech to the assembled chiefs at Kumasi in March, Nathan reminded Stewart that his statement, “tantamount to a promise” that the government would not search for the Golden Stool, was to be regarded as an order. Determined not to give the dissidents “a good cry against the government”, Nathan was constantly uneasy about what he regarded as an ominous stillness in Ashanti.

That uneasiness was fed by regularly recurring rumours of a new rising passed on by Edmund Morel, editor of the Liverpool-based publications *West Africa* and *West African Mail*, and from directors of gold mining companies, notably one William Regan, whom the Colonial Office suspected of inventing the rumours in order to profit personally from a drop in share prices. Nathan and the Colonial Office were disposed to take Morel seriously but Stewart was not, commenting in exasperation: “… the rising is in September this year, last year October, the year before August. He thinks they are birds, I think, from the months laid down for shooting to commence”. Nathan was not prepared to accept Stewart’s dismissal of the rumours as “Cape Coast news” fabricated by the less responsible adherents of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society based in that town. Even when he revisited Kumasi in March, 1903, and found the Ashanti submitting peacefully to formal rule, Nathan attributed this to “the well-organized and disciplined military force in their midst” and recommended very strongly that the garrison be retained.

If Nathan’s pragmatism is more marked than his dedication to any ideal of “indirect rule” in Ashanti, his Northern Territory policy is a clear indication that he preferred where possible to fashion an administration in which indigenous authorities had no significant role. The segmentary nature of the societies of that vast region had proved in the short term to be an advantage for the colonial government, since no massive and expensive campaign like that waged in Ashanti had been necessary. But the declaration of a formal protectorate in 1901 had left the “Commissioner” in an invidious position, virtually a mere Resident in a territory which he was meant to rule but first had to pacify. Morris saw himself as filling the role of “head chief” over all the tribes of the Territories but admitted that his writ ran only so far as a European officer was present to enforce it. In the case of those acephalous tribes which the British lumped together under the label of “Fras-Fras”, the Commissioner’s commands did not carry even this weight and in a series of punitive expeditions from 1900 to 1902 Morris set out to bring the “Fra-Fras” to heel.
Nathan was acutely uneasy about this piecemeal pacification and in 1901 he successfully exerted pressure on the Colonial Office to edit out of Morris's report the more grandiloquent passages describing what Nathan disparaged as "victories against naked savages armed only with bows and arrows".\(^{68}\)

Morris's successor, A.E.G. Watherston, was severely critical of the punitive expedition policy which, in the absence of effective administrative follow-up he considered "worse than useless".\(^{69}\) Though Morris was the agent of this policy, Nathan as Governor bore the responsibility and his cautions to Morris to avoid a "fire-and-sword" approach to the pacification of the "Fra-Fras"\(^{70}\) did not obscure his ambition to produce order in the Northern Territories as rapidly as possible. In Nathan's opinion, the expeditions were essential "... as if we fail to give support and protection to those chiefs and people who are loyal and peaceful we shall not be able to count on their loyalty and peacefulness in the future".\(^{71}\)

In Nathan's mind the scheme of administration best suited to a pacified Northern Territories evolved piecemeal and over a period of several years but its main characteristic—military rather than civil rule—followed naturally from the punitive expedition policy. Even near the end of his term Nathan was still convinced that a civil administration in the north would be "costly and at the present time quite unnecessary".\(^{72}\) After his departure he went so far as to ask the Chief Justice to drop a hint to his successor that the Northern Territories should not be emancipated too soon from military rule:\(^{73}\)

... any attempt to amend it would be sure to result in strong pressure from unofficial members [of the Legislative Council] to have an Ordinance which would lessen the government's control of the chiefs while it would not increase the power of the chiefs to deal with the people under them—though it might increase the power of the scholar to worry both chiefs and government.

Morris shared Nathan's views on the administration's duty to "control" the chiefs. He wrote to Nathan of the endless hours he spent hearing "a most varied assortment of complaints, most of which of course are never recorded, but they all have to be listened to and a decision given".\(^{74}\) Even more than in Ashanti, such chiefs as were to be found in the Northern Territories were seen as mere spokesmen for factions, with the government acting not just as mediator but as arbitrator. As Morris saw his role, it was to hand down decisions "in small things as well as in great" and Nathan saw no threat in this to traditional leaders as he interpreted their function under British rule.
Thus, indirect rule of the Lugard variety was never tried in the Gold Coast hinterland during the crucial years after annexation when it had the best chance of succeeding. By the time it was attempted in the 1920s, indigenous authorities had been so undermined by neglect that, as Governor Guggisberg warned, "... if the process continues indefinitely, it will inevitably lead to the complete loss of power by the chiefs, and, to the substitution of direct for indirect rule, a change that would be entirely contrary to government's policy." The policy Guggisberg referred to was his own; in contrast, Nathan's efforts more than twenty years earlier had been to prepare the ground for the day when money and staff permitted, not the "substitution of direct for indirect rule", but the transition from a weak form of direct administration to a point where it might be possible to "dispose with the assistance" of the chiefs.

In the north, newly annexed and not yet circumscribed by precedents and promises, Nathan had a relatively free hand to choose the form of administration he preferred, so long as it was neither too expensive nor too zealous in its attempts to press forward with potentially disruptive changes. But in the coastal area, delimited under a 1901 Order-in-Council as the Gold Coast Colony, he was bound by the conventions of more than half a century of formal British relations with the chiefs to adopt an even more careful course than that which he steered in Ashanti and the Northern Territories. The Order-in-Council empowered him "... by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council" to legislate for the colony but he found that for a number of reasons he could not entirely dispense with the services of the chiefs, despite the preference for direct administration implicit in his reorganization of the colony's administration under provincial commissioners. In practical terms he needed the chiefs as labour recruiters and to preside over native tribunals, no matter how unsatisfactory the district officers and the Chief Justice found them in those roles; he needed them as evidence of Chamberlain's sincerity in assuring the Commons: "We do not want to destroy the authority of the chiefs, but to regulate it"; and, above all, he needed them because the Aborigines Rights Protection Society refused to countenance wholesale depositions of chiefs in the colony without loud and embarrassing protest.

Founded four years before Nathan's arrival, the A.R.P.S. flexed its muscles to better purpose in its infancy than in the era after the 1901 Order-in-Council, when the colonial government was in a stronger constitutional position than it had been in the nineteenth century. A.R.P.S. opposition in the nineties had been the main
reason for the dropping of the government's plan to take over all "vacant" land in the coastal colony and by the time of Nathan's arrival a compromise had been worked out in the form of the 1900 Concessions Ordinance which left with the chiefs the right to grant leases to mining companies. Thus, as in Sierra Leone, Nathan took office at a time propitious for the establishment of smoother relations between the government and the vocal educated African section of the community. But, with a zeal born of his ignorance of local conditions and his desire to please his masters at home, the new governor was not long in stirring up hostility not only among African leaders but also among the European vested interests on the coast.

The first indication of African distrust of Nathan's intentions came not from the moderate A.R.P.S. but from J.E. Casely Hayford, a young African barrister whose newspaper *The Gold Coast Leader* was at odds with the A.R.P.S. leadership which the *Leader* represented in an open letter to Nathan as "... irresponsible, treacherous natives who would seize upon every opportunity to misrepresent matters to Your Excellency as to the motives and actions of local journals." The *Leader* had equally little liking for the Cape Coast Chamber of Commerce—"... in reality a set of secret service men working as the tool of the Government more for other purposes than that of Commerce". But in opposing one of Nathan's pet schemes, the *Leader*, self-styled spokesman of the young African, found itself unexpectedly allied with the Europeans who belonged to the Chamber.

One of Chamberlain's instructions to Nathan was an exhortation to improve the health of the Gold Coast. The engineer in Nathan was attracted by the prospect of visible change which might earn him favour at the Colonial Office and the first orders he issued as governor were for the regulation of sanitation at Sekondi, the coastal terminus of the new railway. After inspecting the older port of Cape Coast—"the unhealthiest, dirtiest and most evil-smelling place I have visited in West Africa"—Nathan proposed to clean it up. Not an unqualified admirer while in Sierra Leone of Ronald Ross's anti-mosquito campaign to control malaria, Nathan nevertheless supported the proposals of Ross's Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine to improve the health of expatriates on the west coast by segregating European quarters from the African dwellings in coastal towns. Because there was no Hill Station to resort to on the Gold Coast's low-lying seafront, Nathan called in Dr M. Logan Taylor to investigate conditions at Cape Coast. Taylor produced a wide-ranging report, recommending improved sanitation and stronger
building regulations, but the key to his solution lay in the last paragraph.42

Considering the state of the town and the very high mortality there among the Europeans resident in it, both officials and non-officials, I would strongly urge that they live out of town. The quarters for the officials are very poor ... and they are surrounded by natives .... The odours arising from these native quarters are anything but conducive to the good health of the Europeans.

In his efforts to follow Taylor's advice, Nathan ran head-on into the combined opposition of the Leader and of the Chambers of Commerce. The Leader charged Nathan with a secret design to make Cape Coast "desolate" and depicted the segregation scheme as "a monumental and most painful distinction between the white and black subjects of His Gracious Majesty".83 Concerned less with principle than with profit, the Chambers of Commerce protested against the expense of relocating their buildings and the damage to their relations with African customers, and the British Chambers threatened to send out a private commission to examine the entire question of sanitation and especially the extent to which the colonial government should bear the expense of improvements. Nathan was far less anxious about Casely Hayford's strictures than about the proposed enquiry which, he feared, would "... only stir up trouble and make recommendations ... without full knowledge of the financial and administrative difficulties in carrying them out".84 Having once been momentarily under the spell of Mary Kingsley's ideas concerning merchant participation in policy making, Nathan was also no doubt aware that Chamberlain had not officially retreated from his flirtation in the late 1890s with the Chambers of Commerce and might agree to the commission as proof of good faith. But he had no need for apprehension; Chamberlain told the Colonial Office to make an appointment with the Chambers' deputation, adding: "... let them discourse. I will see them with pleasure and have only one question to ask them. What tax do you recommend me to impose upon you to carry out your ideas?"85 This approach effectively defused the Chambers' threat and Nathan was left free to pursue his schemes, eventually enjoying the satisfaction of an admission by the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce that health at Cape Coast had "generally improved" as a result of his efforts.86

Nathan's relations with the merchants were not always so smooth, though they generally concluded amicably. The Chambers were eager to see the Gold Coast's mining potential developed but
remained inflexibly opposed to contributing towards the expense of railway and road building which this entailed. They were even bent on avoiding costs more closely connected with the ratification of mining concessions, as Nathan found when he made his first move to take the Chambers into his confidence by sending them, in advance of their submission to the Legislative Council, the rules for marking the boundaries of claims made under the 1900 Concessions Ordinance. A sub-committee of the Liverpool Chamber objected strenuously against the provision for cleared boundaries and solid stone or concrete markers because this would consume capital needed for actual mining. Nathan not only rejected this assertion, on the grounds that he had secured the agreement of the local mines managers to the boundary rules, but reacted sharply to the committee’s call for regulations which would not “hamper” the infant industry. It was his object, he insisted, to assist adequately capitalized companies but he would do everything in his power to check the “unwholesome traffic” in the shares of “concerns pre-doomed to failure”.

Having allied himself with the responsible elements of the merchant and mining community, Nathan emerged before he left the Gold Coast as a firm advocate of consultation with the Chambers, persuading Chamberlain in 1903 to sanction the submission of pending legislation to these associations before they went to the Legislative Council. Ultimately he became transformed in the eyes of the president of the Liverpool Chamber from a dubious factor in west African trade to one of the most “cooperative” of governors.

A stormier passage awaited Nathan in his efforts to establish harmonious relations with the African spokesmen in the coastal colony. While his dealings with the merchants underwent a transition from rancour to reconciliation, with the Aborigines Rights Protection Society Nathan found himself moving in the opposite direction. Unlike Casely Hayford, then a maverick in his relations with the A.R.P.S., the Society’s newspaper Gold Coast Aborigines hailed Nathan’s Cape Coast sanitation scheme as evidence of his “well-known keen foresight and indefatigable activity”, emphasizing his reputation during his Sierra Leone term as a governor who “… did so much for the good and welfare of our colour, across the waters …” Despite a recent implication to the contrary, the Aborigines’ approving tone characterized relations between Nathan and the parent Cape Coast section of the A.R.P.S. throughout his administration. But towards the newer Axim branch he was at first suspicious and then increasingly hostile.

When he compulsorily acquired land in Sekondi in order to put
into effect his project for segregating the European quarter, Nathan touched the Axim branch on its sorest spot, the sanctity of traditional land rights. A strongly worded petition followed and Nathan took a stand on procedural niceties by refusing to accept an approach from a branch whose existence was not officially recognized. Though he never forgave the Axim leaders for what he regarded as the "somewhat discourteous" tone of their replies to him, Nathan depicted his own attitude to the more moderate and respectful Cape Coast A.R.P.S. as "by no means unfriendly". Although this description cannot be accepted as entirely candid, since it appeared in a private letter to John Mensah Sarbah, an African Legislative Council member whom Nathan held in unusually high esteem, and was in any case only a parenthetical remark during a longer attack on the "usurious" dealings of J.W. Sey, the A.R.P.S. president, it nevertheless is an accurate version of the approach he adopted in his official dealings with the Cape Coast leadership.

Most of these dealings came during the latter part of Nathan's governorship and concerned the vital issue of the rights and tenure of chiefs in the colony. Though he had been obliged to show his hand when he had been creating new administrations for Ashanti and the Northern Territories, he did not at once arouse the A.R.P.S.'s suspicion that he also planned to depose chiefs in the colony found guilty of recalcitrance or inefficiency. That he intended to follow such a policy first became clear in private early in his administration when he informed Chamberlain of his ambition to make a new generation of chiefs into labour contractors for the government. But the negative side of this scheme became apparent to the A.R.P.S. only in 1902 when Nathan deposed Kwamina Faibir, chief of Tarkwa and Awudua, for "defiance" and rejected the society's plea for the chief's reinstatement.

Although he would not back down after the event, Nathan accepted, at least pro forma, the A.R.P.S. argument that future destoolments, like elections, should be ratified by customary procedures. With characteristic thoroughness he set about drafting legislation to regulate the deposition of chiefs who had fallen into disfavour with the government or with their followers, but soon discovered that his newly created Native Affairs Department was not equal to the complex task of compiling a compendium of custom on the subject. He turned to the A.R.P.S. and ran into a conspiracy of silence. His letters at first went unanswered, and when Nathan sent curt reminders he received inadequate replies. This battle of wills
lasted throughout 1903 but before he left the Gold Coast Nathan had pushed his Chiefs Ordinance through the Legislative Council over the protests of the African members. J.P. Brown, the new president of the A.R.P.S., denounced the legislation as unwarranted interference with the right of the people to choose and to depose their chiefs. Casely Hayford’s *Leader* was predictably more blunt, describing the ordinance even before it was passed as “... the most iniquitous, insidious and interfering piece of legislation nicely worded that could be devised” and dubbing it “the Nathanian axe”, to be bracketed in infamy with Governor William Maxwell’s Lands Bill of 1894 and Hodgson’s Golden Stool fiasco. The *Leader*’s epithets did not stick to the Chiefs Ordinance and the newspaper’s condemnation of Nathan did not significantly weaken his standing with the educated A.R.P.S. leaders. In the long term the lack of effective opposition to the ordinance was due to the growing rift between those leaders and the chiefs. However, in Nathan’s time in the Gold Coast it can be attributed to his successful sugaring of the pill by constantly emphasizing his intention to shore up the powers of the leading chiefs, as opposed not only to minor chiefs but even to the educated “intelligentsia”. This is evident in the reluctance with which he appointed J.P. Brown to the Legislative Council in 1904. He first offered the vacancy to Nana Mate Kole, the progressive Konor (paramount chief) of the increasingly important Manya Krobo cocoa-growing area, and was disappointed when the chief declined. The effect of Brown’s subsequent appointment was to delay for seven crucial years the appearance of a chief in the Council, seven years during which educated A.R.P.S. leaders held both of the African seats and strengthened the elite’s vision of itself as the rightful representative of the people.

During the last phase of his term, Nathan’s depositions under the Chiefs Ordinance were relatively few but his successors used its provisions so freely that 109 chiefs were deposed between 1904 and the repeal of the ordinance in 1927. This insecurity of tenure weakened the potential of the customary authorities to form an alliance with the government, such as that which developed in Buganda, which could serve as a buffer against the rise of an assertive nationalism among the professional class of Africans. Denied by Nathan’s decisions their traditional role as spokesmen for their people, and as collectors of tribute to sustain their independence of the colonial government, the chiefs could not be resuscitated by Sir Frederick Guggisberg’s attempts in the 1920s to restore their prestige.
In the economic as in the political sphere, Nathan’s legacy to the Gold Coast was a mixed blessing, with the balance somewhat on the debit side because of his lack of long term vision and the contingencies of the consolidation period. The clearest example of his reasoning in the economic sphere is his deliberate bursting of the bubble in Gold Coast gold mining shares in his first year in the colony. Gold had been mined on an increasing scale in the 1890s but the speculative excesses, popularly known as the “Jungle Boom”, which followed the defeat of Ashanti and the disruption of the South African Rand by the Boer War, resulted in the floating of some four hundred companies, ostensibly to extract gold from the still incompletely assayed deposits in the colony and Ashanti. Company directors complained bitterly through the British Chambers of Commerce at delays in official confirmation of concessions and Nathan responded by rapidly setting up a survey to carry out a triangulation of the known gold-bearing districts. He soon came to regret his eagerness to help the mining companies, not only because the cost of the survey exceeded estimates but also because the less reputable companies continued to attack the colonial government for allegedly dragging its feet on the completion of the work. Even those firms which succeeded in settling their claims and beginning site development proved uncooperative, competing (in Nathan’s view, unfairly) with the government for the relatively scarce labour resources of the Gold Coast and refusing to work with the Transport Department he had created to control the supply of workers to the mines and the railway which the administration was extending to Kumasi.

Partly as a retaliatory measure, but largely because he feared that a long boom and sudden bust in the gold shares market would damage the Gold Coast’s credit, Nathan decided in September of 1901 that the jungle bubble must be burst artificially before it exploded under the proliferation of speculative companies. He applied the first pinprick in a speech to the Cape Coast Chamber of Commerce in which he denounced the speculators and called for a return to realism in the stock markets of Europe. Although Nathan had acted on his own initiative, Chamberlain not only refused to repudiate his representative but endorsed the speech by releasing a copy to the British press. In the opinion of E.D. Morel, who as editor of West Africa was in close touch with mining interests, Nathan’s words “...fell like a bombshell on the market-riggers”. Their effect was something less than this, since the boom did not lose all its momentum until 1908 and the resurgence of Rand production at the end of the Boer War probably accounts for a gradual drop of
interest in the jungle market from 1902. Nevertheless, there were some loud protests from mining directors at Nathan's attempt to "strangle" the Gold Coast operators.¹⁰⁷

Nathan had no such intention; indeed, he may be criticized for his excessive zeal in encouraging the productive mining companies after 1901, since it detracted from the prospect of diversifying the colonial economy in preparation for the inevitable dwindling of gold resources. In this emphasis on quick returns, Nathan demonstrated a narrowness in the interpretation of his instructions which was more characteristic of him than his brief sally into the realm of policy-making at the time of his bubble-bursting efforts. Chamberlain had ordered him to push ahead the extraction of gold in order to raise revenue by taxing its export. This revenue was designed, not to accumulate a reserve for future economic development, but to cover the cost of the railway, itself intended to fulfill the purpose of controlling Ashanti as much as to open that region's gold seams to British entrepreneurs. Nathan concurred in this not only because of his anxiety about the stability of Ashanti but because he needed to cover his retreat from direct taxation by showing quick returns from the indirect tax on gold. His resort to intervention in the "natural forces" of the share market, anathema to his political masters under normal conditions, was therefore a desperate attempt to force the mining companies to show results, which would give their shares respectability and Nathan the boosted revenue he wanted.

The railway proved for Nathan a constant source of official anxiety and personal pleasure. As earlier in Sierra Leone and later in Hong Kong, he delighted in a professional involvement with a line under construction, reminiscent of his Sudan exploits when he discovered almost as a revelation that he was capable of efficient and engaged work in this aspect of practical engineering. The Gold Coast terrain was as formidable as that of the Sudan, the lack of ballast near the line of rail making it the most expensive of British west African railways to construct.¹⁰⁸ However, the most serious problem which came within Nathan's purview was the chronic shortage and expense of labour for the work gangs, and here his difficulties were largely self-inflicted; the absence of a direct tax allowed the Gold Coast Africans to avoid paid employment and the solution of importing labour from other west African colonies was closed to him, for when he tested Colonial Office opinion on this subject he found quoted against him his own refusal while acting governor of Sierra Leone to permit such recruitment by private companies or by other colonial administrations.¹⁰⁹
The completion of the railway to Kumasi, in any case not his own proposal, was Nathan's only genuine accomplishment in the communications sphere in the Gold Coast. Two recent investigators have praised Nathan's efforts in this field, one for his "remarkable foresightedness" in recommending as early as 1901 the construction of roads capable of carrying vehicular traffic, and the other for building roads to assist the indigenous cocoa-growers to evade the monopoly of transport by merchants. Nathan deserves minimal credit either for originality or for achievement in this crucial area. His enthusiasm for roads stemmed, like his sanitation schemes and his emphasis on the gold industry, from Chamberlain's instructions and rapidly waned under the impact of Gold Coast realities, both topographical and economic. Chamberlain suggested an experiment with "traction vehicles" in his interview with Nathan in 1900 and in 1902 a French White steam-car was shipped, at a cost of £543 plus shipping fees, from Antwerp to Accra. It constantly broke down on the rough tracks of the colony and ended its career by being dumped into the sea. Nathan became disillusioned about road development, not so much because of the steam-car's fickle performance but because of his belief that at best the chiefs could cope only with the clearing and maintenance of bush paths. The London Chamber of Commerce protested that such paths were inadequate for the rolling of palm oil casks to the coast but the Colonial Office accepted Nathan's explanation that the declining palm oil trade did not justify the expense of improved roads. Road development of major consequence therefore had to await the advent of Nathan's successor, Sir John Rodger, who advocated roads in preference to more railways.

Despite Nathan's prescience in his speech on the 1901 estimates about the imminence of a shift in the "centre of gravity" in the Gold Coast's future development, his emphasis on the railway and on gold served to swing that balance in a direction which proved unfavourable for the long-term growth of an economy balanced both regionally and in terms of diversification of production. Opening the western end of the colony and the southern section of Ashanti to rapid transit of goods and the establishment of other ancillary services such as harbour facilities, Nathan's policy overlooked the potential of the eastern districts of Akim and the Volta River region, by his own admission the "agricultural hope" of the Gold Coast. He rejected, for the sound reason that it would entail massive alienation of land to European developers, a scheme for the immediate clearing of the Volta for navigation up to five hundred miles from its mouth at the eastern extremity of the colony, though this decision deprived
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

the east of its most promising avenue of relatively cheap and efficient transport to the coast.  

Nathan was equally cool towards schemes for agricultural innovations which might divert private investment and government revenues from his single-minded pursuit of gold-mining development. He submitted a dampening report on prospects for cotton cultivation which was being pressed by the influential Alfred Jones, backing with a gloomy forecast of transport and labour difficulties his warning to Chamberlain that large-scale land grants would be dangerous. In his treatment of the established rubber trade, Nathan was so off-hand that a junior Colonial Office clerk minuted on one of the Governor's prophecies the remark that exports appeared to be falling away largely because of the "apathy of the Government". One of Nathan's private letters shows that this was a reasonable conclusion; to a request for information from E.D. Morel on the future of the trade he replied: "Even the merchants do not know and I do not much care where the stuff comes from". Like gold exports, rubber had been adversely affected by the 1900 rebellion, for it came from Ashanti's forest areas and Nathan failed to foresee that the restoration of order there would have the effect of providing another twenty years of life to the trade, in the latter period artificially boosted by the demand created in the first world war, until its eventual disappearance in the face of competition from Malayan plantation rubber in the 1920s.

Nathan's sole concession to the agricultural needs of the Gold Coast was his encouragement of the infant cocoa-growing industry. In purely economic terms, he made the right choice, for by the end of the decade the value of cocoa exports exceeded even that of gold, and cocoa rapidly became the colony's staple product. Nathan gave cocoa a boost soon after his arrival by revitalizing (he mistakenly thought at the time that he was "establishing") the government agricultural station at Aburi started in 1889 by Sir William Brandford Griffith but neglected by his successors. Nathan had sufficient vision to see that cocoa, unlike cotton, was a crop which would appeal to the Gold Coast African because it did not demand vast resources of land and capital, and he authorized the distribution of young trees to chiefs in Ashanti. He was alarmed at rumours of a price ring among European traders which threatened to deter the Africans from growing cocoa and tried energetically to unearth it. When he failed to find solid evidence, he threatened to set up a government buying agency but dropped the idea when he learned of Hodgson's unsuccessful efforts in 1899 to create such a body.
Nathan then fell back on an ambiguous warning that he would take “exceptional action” to avert the “agricultural calamity” to the colony which the death of indigenous cocoa growing would produce, pointedly asking the Colonial Office to send to the Liverpool Chamber a copy of his despatch containing the threat. It was an empty gesture, since the rumours of a price ring continued and—short of unprecedented legislation against it, which would have been ruinous to his relations with the merchants—there was nothing he could do. But the indigenous planters weathered the crisis without further help from Nathan beyond his construction of a single road, from Accra north to Osino, the centre of a developing cocoa area.

The significance of Nathan’s administration for the future development of the Gold Coast became apparent only some twenty years later, when Sir Frederick Guggisberg became governor. Though of Jewish descent like Nathan, Guggisberg shared few of his forerunner’s characteristics and none of his adherence to the Jewish faith, obscured in Guggisberg’s case by Canadian birth and an English education in minor “public” schools. An able publicist, he possessed an innovative flair in addition to the advantage of governing the Gold Coast at a time when economic development was both financially feasible and blessed by Whitehall. Nathan, and to a lesser extent Rodger, had to contend with a Colonial Office insistence on solvency and in Nathan’s case this official limitation on his actions was supplemented by fear of Ashanti. Guggisberg put his finger on the major failing of his predecessors’ economic policies when he declared in his first year of office that “... we have nearly all our eggs in one basket”. Although Guggisberg’s biographer is at pains to point out the dependence of his subject’s schemes on a communications base laid down by Nathan, Rodger and Sir Hugh Clifford, Nathan’s personal contributions were slight. Although the “one basket” Guggisberg mentioned was cocoa, whereas Nathan had anticipated that for some time it would be gold, the effect of his adherence to the Colonial Office’s highest priorities, public order and a balanced budget, set the Gold Coast economy on the course which Guggisberg had to redirect through diversification schemes and public investment in the 1920s. If, as R.E. Wraith declares, Nathan’s “reputation as a Governor is still growing after more than sixty years”, this appraisal must rest on his dedication in the Gold Coast to priorities dictated from Whitehall.

On the Colonial Office in the era of consolidation, its resources of vision, personnel and capital stretched thin by the nineteenth century’s legacy of extensive and under-administered territories, the
longer term implications of its own and Nathan’s pragmatism were lost. Standing at the mid-point of a transition from a traditional subsistence economy to one dominated by a single cash crop, and at the moment when the British presence in the region had weathered its final military test, Nathan met with distinction the criteria which the Colonial Office was disposed to apply in assessing a governor’s record. In addition to the *sine qua non* of orderly and parsimonious administration, the essential element among these criteria was an ability on the part of a governor to discriminate along imprecisely stated lines between matters of moment, to be referred unhesitatingly to Whitehall for decision, and questions of purely local concern, which were to be settled decisively on the spot and merely reported to the Colonial Office.

The key to Nathan’s contemporary reputation as a successful governor in the Gold Coast was the precision with which his qualities, both those which originated in his natural caution and those which developed from his military experience and the conscious channelling of his ambition towards securing his superiors’ approval, slotted into the matrix fashioned in a Colonial Office slowly adjusting to the implications of a new empire. The constant cry at the turn of the century was that the empire was not to be governed from Downing Street, then the location of the Colonial Office. Nathan’s prime virtue, in the eyes of the Colonial Office, was the judiciousness with which he chose subjects for reference to London and those on which he acted first and reported after the event. In that early age of the telegraph, a sound index of a governor’s conformity with Colonial Office requirements was the frequency with which he resorted to the despatch of telegrams at times other than imminent hostilities with the indigenous population or other imperial powers; if any other matter was of sufficient importance to justify reference to London it was normally of sufficient complexity and long-term significance to demand a detailed despatch, while the time taken by the sea passage was not long enough to be crucial. Nathan’s experiences as a Commanding Royal Engineer had prepared him for this degree of limited independence, however much his Colonial Defence Committee service had stifled such vision as he possessed. From the Gold Coast he was therefore inclined to use the telegraph at such moments of crisis as the rebellion of the Sierra Leone contingent at Kumasi and during the deliberations on the future of the tax in Ashanti, reserving for detailed despatches his schemes on sanitation and reform of the colonial service. This scrupulousness, so far removed from Lugard’s imperious post facto reports from
Northern Nigeria on the one hand and the constant pleas for direction reaching London from some of his counterparts, earned Nathan the beginnings of his reputation as a proficient and decisive administrator.

Sir Bernard Holland, private secretary to Lord Elgin, the Liberal’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, echoed this consensus even before Nathan’s favourable comparison with Lugard by Antrobus in 1906 when he wrote: “You are one of the Governors from whom we do not hear very much, a sign of merit”. Since one of Holland’s functions was the control of the Secretary of State’s patronage, his remark underlines not only Nathan’s high standing shortly after he left the Gold Coast but also the official view of what characterized meritorious behaviour in a governor seeking preferment.

Even against this background of a burgeoning reputation for discretion and dedication to the Colonial Office’s philosophy of colonial administration, Nathan’s frank amazement at the recognition he received after three years in his first governorship was a natural response to the leap in personal status which it involved. At the end of his first tour in the Gold Coast in 1902, he had been knighted for his services, relatively young (at the age of forty) for such an honour but only three years younger than Lugard, who had become Sir Frederick in the previous year. However, Nathan leapt ahead of Lugard and all of his contemporaries in 1903, when he was named to succeed Sir Henry Blake, an official of long service in Ireland and the colonies, as Governor of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Daily Express voiced a general view when it described the appointment as “rather a surprise”, an opinion shared by the delighted Nathan, who exultantly wrote to his mother of the unexpected speed with which he had risen to “a first class Governorship”. The Hong Kong governorship meant an increase in salary from three to five thousand pounds a year and an even greater enhancement in prestige for a newcomer to the colonial service. Dazzled by his success, Nathan momentarily suppressed his earlier emphasis on the value of sustained service in a single colony or at least in a general geographical area, a view he had expressed not only implicitly in his promotion scheme for the Gold Coast service but directly in a consoling letter to Donald Stewart when Stewart was passed over for the governorship of Southern Nigeria in favour of Sir Walter Egerton from Negri Sembilan in Malaya.

At the request of the Colonial Office, which continued to favour the services of engineers as administrators of colonies undergoing the
first phase of delimitation and basic communications construction. Nathan stayed on in the Gold Coast until 1904 to see the railway through its first six months of full operation. The experience was not altogether happy and he occasionally wondered whether the locomotive would ever "... habitually stick to the line and ... not, as it frequently does now, career off into the forest".

Impatient though he was to steer his own career on to its new and enticing track, he admitted at his departure from the Gold Coast that he felt some regret at "... leaving undone some of the work I was most anxious to do". Among these unfinished projects there was only one which both Nathan and posterity agreed in assessing as crucial, namely the reconciliation of the Ashanti to British rule. Although his Chief Justice, Sir William Brandford Griffith, remained a fervent admirer of Nathan's "generous and far-seeing policy" in refusing to confiscate the lands of the conquered confederacy, a decision which Griffith described as converting an enemy to a loyal ally "within half a generation", Nathan was far from convinced in 1904 that Ashanti was finally at peace.

But the remainder of the unfinished business he described in his farewell to the Legislative Council was petty by comparison; for example, he continued to worry about the salaries and conditions of the colonial officials and the difficulties of his Transport Department, though he left to Griffith the apologia which dwelt on the financial stringencies and the necessity of caution in dealings with Africans recently unsettled by the occurrence of a major rebellion in their midst. Unexpectedly, it was Nathan's adversary the Gold Coast Leader which came closest to identifying the crux of his administrative strategy when, in an uncharacteristic attempt to dilute the criticisms the paper had directed against him, the editor blamed the "misunderstandings and dissatisfactions" which had arisen during his governorship on "the rotten Crown Colony system".

While the Leader was tilting at the allegedly London-centred nature of that system and its meddling with African custom, what the paper overlooked in Nathan's interpretation of his role was his preoccupation with the short term goal. In common with the Colonial Office superiors whom it was his first concern to please, he was obsessed with modest and immediate results in the spheres of public order, budget balancing and local administration, at the cost to the Gold Coast of improved relations between the government and the Africans, both chiefs and "intelligentsia", on whose judgment of British rule the acceptability of the imperial presence would rest. That such a criticism of Nathan's priorities is no mere example of
the wisdom of hindsight may be illustrated by two significant shifts in his attitudes between the brief and relatively idealistic sojourn in Sierra Leone and his term in the Gold Coast, where he bore full responsibility for the tone of his administration.

A zealot for education as a stabilizing force in Freetown, Nathan made no contribution to the progress in this crucial field while in the Gold Coast. Partly perhaps this was so because of his anxiety that a thorough-going system of grants to mission and secular schools could prove expensive, but his main reason was a private disillusionment with the colony’s African elite, who not only demonstrated a similar penchant for criticizing the government to that which had irritated him in his contacts with the Sierra Leone Creoles but also adopted what he regarded as an obstructive position in his plans to rationalize the status of the “loyal” and efficient chiefs.

While Nathan compromised on this subject by reluctantly encouraging the A.R.P.S. in its self-assigned role as the spokesman on custom, he proved quite inflexible in his Ashanti policy, once it was formed, and it must be remembered that this policy crystallized even before he toured the area in 1901. Whereas in Sierra Leone he visited the Protectorate with an open mind, free from the need to justify actions for which he carried any personal responsibility, and was therefore sufficiently alert to realities to observe the resentment of the Africans towards a “revengeful” government, in Ashanti he buried his remarks on the disruptive effects of the British presence in optimistic generalizations about the beneficial effects which his clemency and Stewart’s local knowledge were in the process of producing. Deaf to pleas for Prempeh’s repatriation and the implications for the unity of the Ashanti nation if its key office was left vacant, he set in operation fissiparous forces which twenty years later Guggisberg laboured long, and (in political if not in cultural terms) in vain, to counteract.

Similar to Nathan in his assessment of priorities, Nathan’s successor Sir John Rodger explicitly acknowledged his debt to the administrative decisions, taken under “extremely difficult conditions”, of the 1900—1904 period. The last of the “amateur” governors of the Gold Coast, Rodger shared Nathan’s willingness to work within the circumscribed conditions of the consolidation period but Sir Hugh Clifford and, more markedly, Guggisberg belonged to a new generation of governors whose careers had been spent largely or wholly in the Colonial service. At first sight paradoxically, since such an experience might seem likely to breed a functionary mentality, both men displayed an independence of Whitehall advice and even
directives which stemmed in practical matters from two attributes: a familiarity with the vagaries and machinery of the Colonial Office; and, in the realm of imperial self-justification, from a steeping as junior officials in that high valuation of a governor’s right to assert his views for which Lugard was both a symbol and a prominent publicist.

Nathan’s contrasting estimation of his own purpose and that of the empire was written, while he was in the Gold Coast, in a letter of advice to an ambitious young career officer chafing under the incompetence of his immediate superior and threatening to resign rather than to submit to such direction. Upbraiding him for his youthful arrogance and impatience, Nathan concluded:”

The most useful man in the public service is the one who acts loyally by his seniors and juniors .... there is no lack of opportunity in the long run for the sound man to give evidence of his soundness and for the good public servant of the state to show himself such.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

7. Nathan’s notes of interviews with Hodgson, with other Gold Coast personnel on leave and with businessmen engaged in the west African trade are in Ms. N. 293.
8. Nathan’s record of these meetings is in Ms. N. 35 and Ms. N. 114, N. to Miriam Nathan, 27 Nov. 1900. The Liverpool Chamber of Commerce published the proceedings of the formal reception as Report of a Conference with His Excel-
lency the Governor of the Gold Coast, Major Matthew Nathan, C.M.G., held on
Tuesday, 27th November, 1900 (Liverpool, 1900).

9. Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, holds a file (Mss. Afr. s. 215, “Cor­
respondence with the C.O. regarding Customs and Medical Departments [Gold
Coast], 1893-1900”), which illustrates four cases of inefficiency and faction-
fighting in the period, one of which involved arrears in the accounts of the Cape
Coast Customs service. As late as 1909, a circular letter from the Secretary of
State warning officers of the “disgrace and official ruin which will certainly follow
[evidence of] concubinage with native women” was included in instructions issued
to Gold Coast colonial service officers; see Rhodes House, Mss. Afr. s. 453,
“Gold Coast Documents and Regulations regarding Conditions of Government
Service, 1898-1937”.

10. Ghana National Archives, Accra (hereafter cited as G.N.A.), Adm. 13/6, Ex­
ecutive Council Minutes, April-June 1901; Ms. N. 312, N. to Donald Stewart, 24
June 1901, instructing Stewart to warn Ashanti officials against speculating on
the gold market.

11. “Immorality” occasionally extended to relations between Europeans: in 1901,
there was one proven case of adultery between a married medical officer and a
nurse in Accra (see Ms. N. 214, Mrs. Charles Hobhouse, Colonial Nursing As­
sociation, to N., 9 June 1901.

12. A petty example occurs in Rhodes House, Mss. Afr. s. 215, “Correspondence ...
regarding Customs and Medical Departments ...”; T.E. Fell, in 1900 a Customs
Inspector (later a Travelling Commissioner), complained to his superiors of the
“unsociability” of one of his staff, J.A. Crabb, in March, 1900, but a month later
was defending him against criticism of his treatment of Africans from other
Customs officers (Fell to G. Attrill, Comptroller of Customs, 18 March, and to
H.M. Hull, Assistant Colonial Secretary, 22 April 1900).


14. Ms. N. 312, N. to Low, private, 22 April 1901. Nathan’s early opinion of Low is
in Ms. N. 114, N. to Miriam Nathan, 7 Feb. and N. to Antrobus, 20 Feb. 1901.

15. C.O. 96/392, minute by Antrobus, 12 Oct. on N. to Antrobus, private, 12 Feb.
1902, a letter attached to Low’s resignation, dated 25 Sept. 1901.

16. Ms. N. 305, Arthur to Lieut. Francis B. Henderson, acting Chief Commissioner
of Ashanti, Aug. 5 (copy); Ms. N. 115, N. to Miriam Nathan, 26 Dec. 1902.

17. C.O. 96/408, minutes on N. to Chamberlain, telegram, 18 July 1903.

18. Fell’s letters to his parents, 24 Nov. 1900, 1 July 1902, and 29 April 1903 (Rhodes

19. Colonial Office Confidential Report, African (West) No. 645, Further Cor­
respondence (July, 1900, to August, 1903), relating to the Currency of the West
African Colonies, N. to Chamberlain, 13 Jan. and 26 July 1902. It is notable that,
of the west African governors, only Lugard (2 May 1903) opposed Chamberlain’s
decision not to introduce a subsidiary coinage.

20. The scheme is outlined in C.O. 96/377, N. to Chamberlain, 15 Feb. and
elaborated in N.’s despatch of 25 Nov. 1901 (C.O. 96/384).

21. Minutes by Antrobus and Ommeney, 21-22 March, on Nathan’s despatch of 15
Feb. 1901.

22. Ms. N. 312, N. to E.H. Marsh, Colonial Office, June 1, and C.O. 96/408, N. to
Chamberlain, confidential, 18 July 1903.

23. T.E. Fell to his parents, 19 June 1902.


25. Nathan’s confidential despatches of 26 June 1901 (C.O. 96/381) and 18 March
26. The system can be seen evolving in Ms. N. 312, N. to Peregrine, 6 July 1901, and in the confidential despatches of 15 Feb. 1901 (C.O. 96/377), 5 March 1902 (C.O. 96/395) and 8 Nov. 1903 (C.O. 96/410).

27. For a discussion of this issue, see below pp. 75-76.

28. Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, LXIV (1902) Cd. 788-45, Gold Coast Annual Report, 1901, p.6. The increase was ascribed in this report to the incorporation of the former Hausa Constabulary (renamed the Gold Coast Regiment) in the newly-constituted West African Frontier Force but C.O. 96/377, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 9 Jan. 1901, and minutes on 27 Feb. by Antrobus, Ommanney and Chamberlain make it clear that the force was increased only because of Nathan's fears of Ashanti, although Chamberlain privately continued to believe Willcocks's claim that Ashanti was "thoroughly smashed".


34. Ms. N. 114, N. to Miriam Nathan, 30 Nov. 1901.

35. From 1905, annual instalments of £20,000 were included in the estimates for payment to the Imperial Government until the debt was consolidated in the First World War and buried under the rubric of Public Debt.

36. Probably because of this dispute, Lugard twice refused Nathan's invitation to go ashore at Accra when travelling to and from Nigeria on leave.


38. Cf. C.O. 96/343, Stewart to Hodgson, 28 Nov. 1898 (enclosed in Low to Chamberlain, 6 Jan. 1899) and Ms. N. 310, Stewart to N., 14 Jan. and 12 July 1901, for Stewart's reversal of opinion on the tax.


40. C.O. 96/379, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 23 April and Chamberlain to N., 30 July 1901.


42. Ms. N. 310, Morris to N., 12 July; Ms. N. 312, N. to Morris, 19 Aug.; C.O. 96/382, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 22 Aug. 1901.

43. C.O. 96/383, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 8 Nov. 1901, and minutes by H.J. Read (16 Dec.), and Ommanney (3 Feb. 1902).


46. Ashanti (Oxford, 1923); Religion and Art in Ashanti (1927); Ashanti Law and Constitution (1929); The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland ( 2 vols; 1932).
47. See, for example, Upkabi, "The British Colonial Office Approach to the Ashanti War ...", *Acta Africana*, XI, 93.
49. Nathan's speech to the assembled Ashanti chiefs at Kumasi, enclosed in C.O. 96/378; N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 25 March 1901.
50. Ms. N. 312, N. to Stewart, 21 June 1901.
51. C.O. 96/378, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 10 March 1901.
52. Ibid., 21 May 1901.
55. Ms. N. 294, District Commissioner, Tarkwa, to N., 30 June; Ms. N. 312, N. to D.C., Tarkwa, 10 July 1901.
56. Ms. N. 308, F.B. Henderson to N., 14 March, 15 and 19 July; Ms. N. 312, N. to Henderson, 9 April; C.O. 96/398, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 4 Sept. 1902.
59. No. N. 310, Stewart to N., 30 April; Ms. N. 312, N. to Stewart, 17 May 1901. In this speech, Nathan had said: "The Resident has told me that the golden stool has to do with your religion, and I am not going to interfere with your religion, so long as nothing inhuman or immoral is done under its sanction".
60. C.O. 96/407, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 31 March 1903.
61. Ms. N. 298, Morel to N., 26 Nov. 1902; Ms. N. 309, Morel to Stewart (copy) 23 April 1903; Ms. N. 313, N. to Morel, 15 June 1903; Ms. N. 309, Morel to N., 9 July 1903.
62. C.O. 96/393, Regan to C.O., 15 and 22 Aug. 1901, and minutes by Read and O'manney (16 and 28 Aug.).
63. Ms. N. 310, Stewart to N., 3 June 1903.
64. C.O. 96/407, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 31 March 1903.
65. Ms. N. 310, Morris to N., 12 July 1901.
67. C.O. 96/364, Low to Chamberlain, confidential, 4 Dec. 1900, enclosing Morris's report of an expedition in March; Ms N. 310, Morris to N., 30 Sept. 1901, announcing forthcoming expedition; C.O. 96/397, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 31 May 1902, enclosing report of an expedition in March; C.O. 96/399, N. to Chamberlain, 24 Dec. 1902, enclosing report of an expedition by Lieut. G.M. Griffith. Morris's letter of September 1901, contains a reference to the remark of a Fra-Fra "chief" that he did not acknowledge the power "... of any white man, and that the only person above him was his God".
68. Ms. N. 312, N. to Antrobus. 13 April, and N. to Morris, 14 April; C.O. 96/397, N. to Chamberlain, 13 May 1902. The report, without the offending passages, was printed in Colonial Office Confidential Print, African (West) No. 704, *Despatches relating to the Field Operations in the Northern Territories, 1899-1902.*
70. Ms. N. 310, Morris to N., 30 Sept. 1901, referring to an earlier instruction from Nathan.
71. C.O. 96/383, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 9 Nov. 1901.
72. Ms. N. 313, N. to F.B. Henderson (District Officer, Ashanti), 13 Feb. 1904.
73. Ms. N. 313, N. to Sir William Brandford Griffith, 25 June 1904. The hint was not followed; from January 1907, Watherston became Chief Commissioner at the head of a purely civil administration and in his article (see note 69 above) he criticized his military predecessors for currying favour with the War Office by concentrating on the efficiency of their soldiers at the expense of effective administration.
74. Ms. N. 310, Morris to N., 28 June 1903.
77. *Hansard*, XLI (1901), 363, 18 March.
78. 5 July 1902.
79. 13 Sept. 1902.
83. 10 Jan. and 6 June 1903. Cape Coast fears of a decline in its fortunes dated back to 1851, when the first and unsuccessful attempt to transfer the colony’s headquarters to Accra foundered on a storm of local opposition, though the move was carried through with little difficulty in 1877; see J.M. Akita, “The Transfer of the Seat of Government from Cape Coast to Accra”, *Gold Coast Teachers’ Journal*, 1 (March 1956), 42-47.
84. Ms. N. 312, N. to Alfred Jones, Liverpool Chamber, 15 May 1901.
85. C.O. 96/389, Liverpool Chamber (4 March) and Manchester Chamber (13 March) to Chamberlain; minute by Chamberlain, 5 March; and report of the interview, 15 March 1901.
86. C.O. 96/411, Liverpool Chamber to Chamberlain, 7 Oct. 1903.
88. C.O. 96/410, N. to Chamberlain, 23 Sept. 1903. On the prelude to this arrangement, see Mss. N. 309 and 312 for N.’s correspondence with Alfred Jones, and Ms. N. 313, N. to Antrobus, 11 June 1903.
89. Ms. N. 140, Alfred Jones to N., 11 Sept. 1903.
90. 22 April 1901, and 18 Jan. 1902.
92. The correspondence between the Axim branch and Nathan is in G.N.A. Adm. 1/767 and is reprinted in Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (London, 1903), pp. 382-96.
THE GOLD COAST

93. Ms. N. 312, N. to John Mensah Sarbah, 25 June 1901, and 2 April 1902. For Nathan's high opinion of Sarbah, see Ms. N. 313, L.R. Arthur (acting governor) to Franklin Hurst, 10 Sept. 1902.

94. C.O. 96/378, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 16 March 1901. Evidence of Nathan's intentions is to be found also in the Report of the Native Affairs Department, 1903, which lists the deposition of five Colony chiefs in that year (before the passage of the Chiefs Ordinance of 1904), only one at the request of his followers. Three were destooled on grounds of "misconduct" and "misrule" and one for implication in a murder.

95. See the exchange of correspondence between Arthur and the A.R.P.S. president, 2 Jan. and 18 Jan. reprinted in Gold Coast Aborigines, 19 April 1902.


97. C.O. 98/11, Legislative Council minutes, 8 Jan. 1904.

98. 14 Nov. 1903, and 2 Jan. 1904.

99. Nathan's successor, Sir John Rodger, made an attempt in 1906 to draft a new Ordinance further circumscribing the chiefs' jurisdiction but was opposed by his Attorney-General and Colonial Secretary; see Gold Coast Government, History of legislation in connection with Native Jurisdiction in the Gold Coast (Accra, 1931), pp. 6-7.

100. Ms. N. 313, N. to Mate Kole, 4 July 1903.


102. For complaints about the concessions courts, see C.O. 96/390, London Chamber of Commerce (27 Sept.) and Liverpool Chamber to Chamberlain (12 Oct. 1901). The leaders of the survey team were two Royal Engineers later prominent in the Gold Coast administration, Major Alan Watherston and Captain (later Sir) Frederick Guggisberg; see R.E. Wraith, Guggisberg (London, 1967), p. 26.

103. See note 87, above.


105. C.O. 96/383, N. to Chamberlain, confidential, 24 Sept., enclosing a copy of the Cape Coast speech; The Times, 28 Nov. 1901.


SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

111. Wraith, Guggisberg, pp. 78-79.
113. There is an account of elaborate track-clearing by chiefs around Kpong, and a series of breakdowns before Nathan's arrival there from Accra in 1903, in Harry Martin (he Rosenthal), "Reminiscences of a Member of the Trading Firm of Swanzy in the Gold Coast", Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Mss. Afr. s. 610, p.12.
116. See the reference to Nathan's opposition to a scheme put forward by a British consortium, which proposed to invest in the clearance of the Volta in return for a land grant, in Ms. N. 295, Ommanney to N., 23 Aug. 1901.
117. Ms. N. 312, N. to Jones, 22 Jan.; C.O. 96/384, N. to Chamberlain, 26 Nov. 1901. Here Nathan drew a rather disingenuous distinction between mining concessions and grants for agriculture, emphasizing the latter's scale and implications for the status of the chiefs, despite his proclivity for undermining that status by legislation.
120. Kwame Arhin, "The Ashanti Rubber Trade with the Gold Coast in the Eighteen-Nineties", Africa, XLII, 1 (Jan. 1972), 34, quotes export figures showing a steady growth in quantity and value until the end of the decade.
123. Ms. N. 312, N. to Jones, 22 Jan. 1901; Ms. N. 313, N. to Morel, 15 June 1903.
125. Both Nathan and Rodger tried to avoid "political intervention in a commercial transaction", though both suspected the existence of a cocoa price ring, and in 1911 Rodger took direct action against the merchants; see Wraith, Guggisberg, pp. 78-79.
126. Speech to the Legislative Council, 17 Nov. 1919, reprinted in Metcalfe, Great Britain and Ghana, pp. 575-78.
127. Wraith, Guggisberg, p. 78. Wraith notes that Nathan and Rodger had "...both been motivated by a desire to avoid trouble" but overstates Nathan's achievement in improving communications in assuming that he had pressed the construction of roads as well as the railway (p. 79).
128. Ibid, p. 27.
130. Among frequent references to this desire to avoid excessive centralization on the French pattern of imperial administration, see the minute by Antrobus, 18
March, on C.O. 96/395, N. to Chamberlain, 13 Feb. 1902, a despatch concerning a London Chamber of Commerce protest about the slow progress in building the Sekondi-Axim telegraph: "As all commercial enterprises in west Africa are managed from England, it is very difficult to persuade the Chambers of Commerce and others that we do not govern from Downing Street".

131. Ms. N. 333, Holland to N., 1 March 1905. For a contemporary Colonial Office remark on the tendency of some governors to demand excessive direction from above, see the minute by Ommanney, C.O. 446/50, 31 July 1905, quoted in Hyam, Elgin and Churchill, p. 471.

132. Hong Kong Daily Express, 10 Sept.; Ms. N. 115, N. to Miriam Nathan, 10 Sept. 1903. Nathan's description of the Hong Kong post as "first class" reflected its informal status (based largely on salary and seniority) rather than any official classification, which did not emerge until the 1920s.

133. Ms. N. 313, N. to Stewart, 14 Nov. 1903. Stewart was subsequently transferred from Ashanti to administer the British East Africa Protectorate (Kenya) as Commissioner, a post equivalent to that of Governor.

134. For a comment on the role of engineers as administrative "pace setters" in the "first decade of this century", see Wraith, Guggisberg, p. 27.


136. Ibid., 17 Dec. 1903.

137. See Griffith's letter to the editor of The African World, 23 Dec. 1916, in which he reminded the forgetful British public that Nathan had laid "the foundation of this marvellous change" after Sir Hugh Clifford had omitted to mention Nathan in a speech on 16 Dec.


139. 30 Jan. 1904.


141. Ms. N. 313, N. to Herbert Hargrave, Assistant District Commissioner, Axim, 15 Feb. 1903.
As long as the British colonial empire remained in the consolidation phase of its evolution, governors and their subordinate staff continued to be interchangeable between the geographical sections into which the Colonial Office had been obliged to divide its own business. Rather like the Chinese viceroys with whom Nathan was to have indirect but important dealings from Hong Kong, governors were therefore moved without particular consideration being given to their experience of local conditions, as if the Colonial Office’s faith in its selection and promotion procedures rested on a belief that the empire was all of a piece, run by the application of principles which, although they lacked the Cartesian precision of the French centralizing philosophy, were adequate to make a proficient administrator of any one colony an equally reliable governor of any other. Thus in Hong Kong Nathan succeeded Sir Henry Blake, a former police officer in Ireland who governed three colonies in the Caribbean and Canada before going on to Hong Kong and Ceylon, where he took over from Sir John West Ridgeway, a retired colonel who worked in India, Ireland and the Isle of Man before serving for a decade as governor of Ceylon. Appointed to the Straits Settlements at the same time as Nathan moved to Hong Kong from the Gold Coast, Sir John Anderson had been a Colonial Office official for twenty-five years before he joined a small group of Downing Street desk men who made the transition to practical administration. The first career officer in the eastern colonies to rise to a governorship was Francis
May, who had entered the service as a Hong Kong cadet and became the colony’s governor in 1912, after serving as colonial secretary to Blake, Nathan and Lugard.

May was a key figure in the administrations of Nathan and Lugard, though he did not get on well with Blake and later turned down the chance to move to Ceylon as colonial secretary while Blake was still that colony’s governor. Two years older than Nathan and with the experience behind him of administering Hong Kong’s affairs in the eight month interregnum between Blake’s departure and Nathan’s arrival, May might easily have taken the aggrieved attitude of Colonel Gore in Sierra Leone when he was obliged to bow to a newcomer. If he felt that he had a grievance, May kept it to himself and served his new master with every appearance of loyalty, achieving an influence with Nathan matched only by that of Donald Stewart in Ashanti. May and Stewart were as different in temperament as a taciturn infantry officer and an ambitious and able colonial servant could be but they each possessed a quality which Nathan valued: they were willing to press their opinions firmly and energetically but to acquiesce in his decision, even when they disagreed with it.

The attitudes which Nathan and Lugard adopted towards May reveal a deep contrast in their temperaments and their interpretation of their role as governor. While in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, Nathan had shown signs of an inability to tolerate incompetent subordinates, but he became a warm admirer of the eastern cadet system, based on a competitive examination next in rigour only to that undergone by aspirants to appointments in the home and Indian civil services. On May, an outstanding product of the cadet scheme, Nathan was content to lean for advice concerning the details of day-to-day administration. Instead of the blitz on local officials’ competence and loyalty which he had considered necessary in the Gold Coast, and in contrast to his abolition of the embryonic cadet system there, Nathan so valued his staff in Hong Kong that he proposed its consolidation, with those of Ceylon and the Straits Settlements, into an “Eastern Civil Service”, on the Indian model which he regarded as the finest exemplar of dedication and efficiency in the overseas territories. While Nathan leant happily on May’s local expertise, as he had relied on Stewart’s in Ashanti, Lugard’s autocratic nature chafed under the restrictions of a quasi-ceremonial post; he felt that all he was required to do was “... to perpetually functionalize... to endure fools gladly, to sign my name perpetually and agree to the faultless suggestions of the Honourable the Colonial Secretary”. For
Nathan, it was simply a relief to find that “... the mail here is less burdened with troublesome despatches than on the Gold Coast so is more acceptable than there”.

Although at the end of his term he came to look upon his Hong Kong administration as a failure, not least because he was brushed aside to make a suitably healthy vacancy for Lugard and his ailing wife, Nathan spent his happiest years as a governor in that colony. Technically a Crown colony like the Gold Coast, with an official majority on the Legislative Council, Hong Kong nevertheless demanded from its governor a willingness to listen to public opinion, at least insofar as it could be said to be represented by the European residents and the substantial Chinese merchants.

This difference from the Gold Coast situation arose from two constitutional circumstances stemming from the entrepot character of Hong Kong commerce: unlike the handful of British traders in Cape Coast and Accra, Hong Kong merchants were generally principals of firms with a well-capitalized local base, voicing their views directly through the Chamber of Commerce, which elected one representative on the Legislative Council, and through the Justices of the Peace (most of them wealthy businessmen) who elected another. After a crisis in the 1890s, the Colonial Office had been obliged to allow the merchants two nominated representatives on the Executive Council, in order to forestall growing demands for an instalment of representative government. While this concession fell short of the representative pattern prevailing in such settler colonies as Natal, it put Hong Kong for a time ahead of the other eastern colonies on the path to emergence from rule by officials, and Sir Montagu Ommanney showed himself aware of Lugard’s inability to operate in constitutional blinkers when in 1906 he remarked that he would not be “ideal” for appointment to the governorship of Natal, with a fully elected legislature and responsible cabinet. Nathan’s known capacity for cooperation with the Chambers of Commerce in west Africa probably accounted for his preferment, although the Colonial Office minutes made no specific reference to this willingness to sacrifice autocratic powers to smooth relations with local men of substance.

Except for the influence of the merchants, Hong Kong differed in almost every conceivable way from the Gold Coast and the painfully acquired acquaintance with African custom and character which Nathan had developed in west Africa proved useless to him in his new post. Only two hundredths the size of Nathan’s west African dominions, Hong Kong (including the New Territories on the
mainland leased from China in 1898) was far more densely settled, its population overwhelmingly Chinese and its then exclusively trading economy dependent on freedom from the taxes on exports and imports on which Nathan had staked his policy in the Gold Coast. With the Kowloon peninsula, annexed in 1860, the New Territories were governed as part and parcel of the Colony, not by the governor’s decree as in Ashanti and the Gold Coast’s Northern Territories, and all legislation was therefore subject to the scrutiny of the Legislative Council, made up of men whose local knowledge, acquired either by long service as officials or longer residence as businessmen, automatically exceeded that of a new governor to an immeasurable degree. The choice for a governor lay between an attempt on the one hand to act as if he had untrammelled personal authority or a contentment with that “perpetual functionalizing” into which even Lugard fell, until he found an outlet for his energies in the creation of a university for Hong Kong. Condemnation of a governor who chose to flex his constitutional muscles to the detriment of the European residents’ influence was quick to follow, as in the case of Sir John Pope Hennessy as early as the 1850s, and Blake’s farewell address in 1903 consisted almost entirely of a defence of his allegedly “pro-Chinese” views, which he characterized as an attempt to “... give equal protection to all ... from the highest to the poorest coolie”.

By instinct, and on his record in west Africa, Nathan was never a candidate for the inheritance of Blake’s pro-Chinese mantle, however Blake might embroider it with references to his concern for the “reward of the educated, upright, honest and successful men of every race”. Although he confronted the vexed political ramifications of that question only in Natal, Nathan remained, from the moment he first tried to persuade his brother Robert that to give responsibility to educated Indians would be “the ruin of the country”, a consistent opponent of the devolution of power, however circumscribed, to “natives”. This consistency, apparent on the social level in his west African schemes for residential segregation, was revealed again even before he arrived in Hong Kong. Francis May, as acting governor, pressed on a reluctant Colonial Office his Peak Reservation Ordinance, designed to reserve for Europeans a residential area on the slopes above the island city of Victoria, while from Ceylon Blake continued to criticize the discrimination against respectable Chinese businessmen which the ordinance would symbolize. Asked by the Colonial Office for his opinion, Nathan chose to remain aloof from the controversy, though he added rather disingenuously that he
thought the local knowledge which May possessed made him the more reliable judge of current Hong Kong opinion.  

Perhaps recalling his own experience as an acting governor in Sierra Leone, and anxious not to reprimand May (as he had been rebuked by Cardew) for failing to serve simply as a caretaker, Nathan was here at odds with the Colonial Office views on the duties of interregnum administrators, and on another issue he took the opportunity to affirm even more clearly than in his oblique support for the Peak Reservation Ordinance that he would not follow Blake's example of conciliating Chinese opinion in Hong Kong. In March of 1904, May banished the editors of several Chinese-language newspapers who had been using Hong Kong as a base for attacking the moribund Chinese imperial government. An enabling ordinance to give the governor the powers which May prematurely employed for these deportations was under review by the Secretary of State at the time and Blake wrote from Ceylon criticizing the high-handed fashion in which May had assumed that the measure would be approved, concluding with a restatement of his own policy, emphasized in his farewell speech, that each Hong Kong resident must be allowed the right "... to think and speak what he likes and to act as well so long as he obeys the laws". While still in London, Nathan was equally uneasy about the practical effects of May's actions but, after some experience of the Hong Kong Chinese press, he changed his mind, fearing that the newspapers' political campaign was damaging his chances of concluding delicate railway negotiations with the Chinese government. In a manner which anticipated his later vacillation in Ireland on the question of suppressing the subversive press, Nathan moved from conciliation to a wholehearted onslaught on the Chinese editors, enforcing the newly authorized deportation ordinance to such effect that a junior Colonial Office clerk minuted: "Punch would get short shrift in Hong Kong if he were of Chinese nationality".  

In Hong Kong as in west Africa, Nathan tended to limit the ambit of his social activities, outside the strict call of ceremonial duty, to contact with the European residents, meeting the Chinese only in formal conclave in the Legislative Council or collectively on public occasions at which the governor's presence was expected as a matter of form, but where he was not called upon to mingle unreservedly with the multitude. While he was capable of admiring the industriousness and consciousness of family ties among the Asiatic peoples, he made no move to ingratiate himself with Hong Kong's
Chinese residents and was quick to take a firm line against the political activists in their midst, whether (as in the case of the Chinese editors) the protests were directed against an Asian government for which he had reason to feel a personal dislike, or against another Western power in competition with Britain for profits and prestige in China.

Although he received the usual address of loyalty and gratitude from the Chinese when he left the colony, its impeccably polite phrasing contrasts with the relatively enthusiastic farewell accorded to Blake four years earlier. Content to work within the limitations on his personal authority which he inherited, Nathan did nothing to extend the involvement of the Chinese in Hong Kong's government. In this, he was in harmony with the prevailing sense of uneasiness about Hong Kong in the Colonial Office. While a British possession of more venerable age than much of the African empire, Hong Kong's potentially perilous position on the flank of an enigmatic Asian polity and, worse still, near the vortex of a continuing whirlpool of rivalry between Western powers, made the colony an aberration in the developing context of settled boundaries and tidy administration within which the Colonial Office was beginning to feel at home. By one of the vicissitudes which left the imperial pattern muddled, Hong Kong's particular problems at the time of Nathan's term flowed over constantly into areas more familiar to the Foreign Office. In contrast, the British East Africa Protectorate (later Kenya) to which Donald Stewart was posted was still in the process of transition from the Foreign Office to Colonial Office jurisdiction, where at least the rudiments of an acquaintance with African conditions had been gathered from the experience of administering possessions similar to Kenya.

For a time after his arrival, Nathan was spared the dawning realization that his official responsibilities would make calls on his abilities for which his earlier experiences in the army and as an African governor had done little to prepare him. Initially engrossed with the minutiae of administration, despite May's efforts to guide him with the same "faultless suggestions" he later offered to Lugard, Nathan found himself for the first time the reluctant symbol of expatriate social life. Government House was in Hong Kong the focus of the white community's aspirations to respectability, diversion and decorum. In this role, Nathan had two handicaps which had hitherto troubled him rarely: as a bachelor, he found it difficult to furnish the correct middle-class atmosphere for Government House entertainments; and as a Jew he was not an immediately acceptable social
leader of the influential Anglican community in the colony. In Hong Kong the formula which Nathan had devised for west Africa came into constant use; he made donations to all religious bodies, specifying that they were to be used for "educational" purposes, and remained as aloof as he decently could from the Jewish community, accepting pro forma the presidency of the local Anglo-Jewish Association but attending the synagogue only once, towards the end of his term. He was momentarily embarrassed when Sir Paul Chater, a wealthy businessman of Armenian extraction, asked him to lay the foundation stone for the Anglican cathedral, to which Chater had contributed a large sum, but was relieved to find that it was "fortunately" the custom for a bishop to perform this ceremony.

Although he safely circumnavigated this sectarian shoal, Nathan once came dangerously close to sticking on the rock of social etiquette when he asked the wife of his private secretary to act as hostess at a small dinner party at Government House. Generally impeccable in his advice on protocol, May failed to warn Nathan on this occasion that precedence indicated the choice of the Chief Justice's wife as hostess when the governor was a bachelor or widower. The incident touched off a prolonged tiff with the offended lady and apparently lived on in the memory of her son, who wrote of Nathan in memoirs published forty five years later as a governor who "... maintained a good deal of state".

Official as well as social protocol could also enmesh a governor in its coils. Villiers Hatton, the prickly general commanding the local garrison, was not happy at the sight of a mere major in Government House, especially at a time when the Colonial Office had recently ruled that the colonial secretary rather than the general was to act for the governor in his absence. Hatton vented his ire on Nathan in a flood of communications over a letter written by Richard Ponsonby, Nathan's private secretary, addressed, against the rules of protocol, to the garrison's chief staff officer instead of to the general in person. At the height of this Gilbertian exchange, Hatton informed Nathan that if "an explanation is not forthcoming ... I am afraid that it will not be possible for me or any of my staff, official or personal, to receive any communication from Mr Ponsonby in future". Not surprisingly, Nathan greeted Hatton's departure in 1906 with a private sigh of relief that he had got through the general's term "... without any major quarrel".

With the rest of Hong Kong society, Nathan coped adequately, if somewhat uncomfortably. He worried that his dinner parties were "slow" and he found troublesome the local ladies' tendency to peti-
tion him "... when they think they don’t get their rights". He once vented this irritation in a draft letter, which he decided not to send, in which he referred to the Hong Kong wives as “pushful persons who would like to ‘get into society’”. But in public he preserved his dignity and, despite a professed detestation of public speaking, became so adept in his hundreds of ceremonial speeches that his counterpart in the Straits Settlements expressed his envious admiration of Nathan as “quite an orator”.

Public appearances filled much more of Nathan’s time in Hong Kong than in his own previous posts but he did his best to keep them to a minimum by finding excuses in what were for him more congenial administrative labours. This was no simple quest for Hong Kong governors during the relatively quiescent era between the lease of the New Territories and the outbreak of the first world war. Lugard was at a loss until he submerged himself in his university scheme and May’s shauq was the completion of public works which he had vainly urged on his predecessors. Nathan’s preoccupation was with the railway between Kowloon and the southern Chinese city of Canton, a project which the Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce, vigorously supported by May, had been urging on the Colonial Office before Nathan’s arrival. The Chamber wanted the British government to reactivate a six year old concession for this line in order to stimulate Hong Kong’s trade with southern China and—more urgently—to forestall a Belgian syndicate which was negotiating for the purchase from American interests of a rival concession from Hankow to Canton. Rumours, subsequently confirmed, indicated that the Belgians were a front for Franco-Russian interests which wanted to extend their proposed line south of Canton to Whampoa, thus threatening Hong Kong’s hold on south China trade.

Nathan’s initial interest in the proposed line was purely professional, a continuation of his earlier concern with west African railways. But the international ramifications of the Canton-Kowloon negotiations drew him into the lower reaches of diplomacy, a region he found exhilarating because of its complete unfamiliarity. The Canton-Kowloon concession belonged to the British and Chinese Corporation, a subsidiary of Hong Kong’s two largest firms, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank and the powerful trading company of Jardine, Matheson. The Corporation had been dilatory in converting its preliminary agreement with the Chinese into a programme of construction and Nathan suspected that the directors were temporizing, with the Chinese government’s intransigence as an ex-
cuse, until they could sell the concession at a profit. Anxious to see construction started, Nathan first called on the good offices of Sir Ernest Satow, British ambassador to Peking, and then of the British consuls at Hankow and Canton, but their combined pressure failed to move the central government and the regional viceroys.

A year of Nathan’s term passed with no visible signs of action from the Corporation or from the Chinese. Hostility was growing in dealings between the Corporation’s directors and G.V. Fiddes, the Colonial Office principal clerk in charge of the British government’s interests; on the periphery a similar rancorous tone appeared in relations between Nathan and C.H. Ross, the Corporation’s Peking representative who complained of Nathan’s insistence that the entire line be run as a joint enterprise with profits distributed between the Hong Kong and Chinese governments in proportion to the cost of construction rather than length of track in the respective territories. Nathan countered with some heat that, although only twenty-two of the line’s 115 miles would pass through British territory, Hong Kong’s difficult terrain—requiring two tunnels, one more than a mile long—more than justified his claim for proportionate profits.

The matter seemed likely to degenerate into internecine squabbling among the various British interests until June of 1905, when Satow discovered proof that the American Hankow-Canton concession was up for sale and that China was eager to redeem it rather than let it pass to France and Russia. The Chinese fear was that the two allies wanted to link Russia’s Manchurian railway system in the north with French lines in Indochina, cementing a strategic and economic stranglehold on China. Britain was equally concerned to stop the Franco-Russian scheme, since it not only threatened Hong Kong’s trade but could serve as an avenue for French military aid to Russia in its war with Japan, Britain’s Asian ally since 1902.

As the British Foreign Office freely admitted, there was no prospect of wringing from a tight-fisted Exchequer a sum large enough to finance a loan to China for the redemption of the Hankow-Canton concession. Satow turned to Nathan, playing up the element of Hong Kong’s trading interests and remarking that a grateful Chinese government might listen to pleas for the Canton-Kowloon line if Hong Kong furnished the Hankow-Canton loan. The Colonial Office hesitated to back the project, especially when it learned that the loan would be made to the Hankow viceroy and not direct to the central Chinese government. But Nathan had no such misgivings; in enthusiastic terms which revealed his excitement at dabbling in high finance he declared that it was of “paramount im-
portance" to Hong Kong that no foreign syndicate should make the vital loan since the *quid pro quo* might be a concession to build the extension line south from Canton to Whampoa. With an alacrity he was later to regret, he accepted at face value Satow's argument that the Chinese would show their gratitude to a beneficent Hong Kong government, though he went beyond Satow's promise of "assurances" and asked for "guarantees".22

Nathan's uncritical espousal of Satow's scheme revealed his ignorance of diplomatic deviousness, both Chinese and British, and his lack of first hand Chinese experience. He never visited China; though he wanted to go to Canton in 1905 to argue his colony's case, Satow and the Canton consul combined forces to prevent this intrusion on their domain by a colonial governor. Satow went as far as to register with the Foreign Office a protest which annoyed Nathan with its reference to "interference".23 But Satow was right, at least in principle, and Nathan erred in drawing an analogy between his own position as a British colonial governor and that of a Chinese viceroy who, in the last years of the Manchu dynasty, was not necessarily bound by the word of the central government or of another viceroy.24 However, Satow's own case for the Hong Kong loan rested on precisely this fallacy and he did not disabuse Nathan of his simple faith until negotiations had gone so far that they could not easily be cancelled. Nathan eventually saw his error and was then obliged to conduct a strategic retreat from "guarantees" through "assurances" of reciprocity on the Canton-Kowloon line, only to settle at last for nothing more than Satow's personal promise to raise the issue with the *Wai Wu Pu*, China's foreign office, in the hope that this would "facilitate" further discussions.25

Nathan triumphantly greeted the raising of a £1,100,000 loan in London as "my financial coup".26 It scarcely justified this description: the Chinese had driven a harder bargain than in earlier transactions, insisting that the loan be issued at par, instead of at a discount such as those which had previously furnished investors with a built-in profit, and successfully driving down the terms to 4½ per cent interest over ten years, whereas China had often borrowed at 5 per cent over periods of twenty-five years and longer in the past.27 The Colonial Office had been forced by an unenthusiastic market in London to offer the loan by tender through the Crown Agents and nearly 70 per cent had to be taken up by the underwriters.28 Reaction in Hong Kong was almost equally cautious, a local newspaper expressing its puzzlement about what "high political considerations" might lie behind the Governor's actions while the Chamber of Com-
merce noted that only a quick settlement of the *quid pro quo* deal on the Canton-Kowloon line would justify the new burden on the colony’s finances. Nathan had anticipated this local response and took the precautionary step of coupling the vote for the loan with another for the construction of the colony’s section of the Canton-Kowloon line, thereby gaining the unanimous approval of the Legislative Council; but he continued to feel some trepidation about the consequences for his personal reputation if the Chinese refused to show their “gratitude” by delaying the negotiations on the extension of the line to Canton.

The events of the next few months seemed fully to justify criticism of the loan. The viceroy at Canton remained indifferent to the good fortune of his Hankow counterpart and bowed before the pressure of anti-foreign elements in his province by ignoring frequent reminders of Hong Kong’s largesse towards his colleague. Unaware of the viceroy’s local difficulties and increasingly conscious of his own, Nathan resorted to the device of indirect threat, asking Satow to press in Peking for the viceroy’s deposition. Nathan’s implied nostalgia for the “destooling” powers he had wielded in the Gold Coast was echoed in the Colonial Office by the veteran George Fiddes, who minuted: “... in the old days we should have ‘called on the British admiral’ before now”. With only persuasion to serve where gunboats might once have penetrated, Satow first secured at Peking an undertaking that the viceroy would be instructed to cooperate and, when this produced no effect, played his last card by threatening to withdraw the British consul-general from Canton. Although this warning brought the viceroy to the negotiating table it did nothing to shift him from his determination not to accept the profit-sharing scheme on which Nathan was insisting, and Satow could not wrest from Peking an assurance that a parallel and competing line in southern China would never be constructed. In June of 1906, Satow and Ross moved the negotiations to Peking despite Nathan’s objection, the fruit of bitter experience with the Hankow loan, that any agreement with the central government might prove worthless in Canton.

The eventual Canton-Kowloon railway agreement, hammered out over another year of intermittent discussion, did not confirm Nathan’s gloomy prophecy that it could become a dead letter, though it justified his fears that China would offer none of the assurances he regarded as essential to commend his Hankow loan to the Hong Kong public and British investors. The line was to be extended to Canton but China gave no guarantee that a competing line would not later be constructed and refused to write Nathan’s joint
operation requirements into the contract. Consequently, when the line began to function in 1911, Hong Kong had to accept a mere third of the profits, instead of the 45 per cent which Nathan had argued for on the basis of construction costs, and the nationalist government of China was free thirty years later, without the need to repudiate its predecessor’s undertakings, to extend the competing Hankow-Canton line to Whampoa, siphoning off some of Hong Kong’s south China trade.34

The long delay affected Nathan’s self-esteem, not only because he was left with little to show for his “financial coup” but also because, without a railway under construction on which to shower his professional attentions and to demonstrate his claims to a personal expertise, he began to feel that the colony gave its governor little opportunity for glory. Though his letters to his mother articulated this sense of frustration less clearly than Lugard’s later admission of futility, they contain some oblique references to the colony’s economic dependence on regional conditions over which he had no control and to the presence in the garrison and the naval squadron of high-ranking officers in whose commands he could not interfere. This half-realized desire to show his usefulness, combined with a pressing need to reconcile local opinion to his seemingly unfruitful foray into diplomacy, accounts for his decision in 1906 to start the construction of the railway north from Kowloon. He was able to justify the project by public references to a survey, completed in the previous year, which showed that the line would pay even if it ended at the Chinese frontier and tapped only the existing and potential trade of the New Territories, but in private he confessed his hope that a railway pointed straight at the heart of Kwangtung province would administer a nudge to the recalcitrant Canton viceroy.35

Whether or not China was impressed by the implied threat to the defence and trade of its southern province, Nathan at last had his railway to watch over. The scrutiny he exercised was so close that the eagerness to display parsimony and engineering prowess which had earned him credit in the Gold Coast began to irritate not only the company commissioned to build the line but also the Colonial Office. The London firm of Barry and Barry with which Nathan had worked amicably in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast were also consultant engineers for the Hong Kong line. Their local representative was W.G. Eves, whose work on tunnel construction Nathan regarded as second rate both in quality and in control of expenditure. Eves responded to Nathan’s criticisms with the strong argument that the Governor had no right to interfere in the details of work which
met contract specifications and the stronger one that Nathan’s meddling was adding to construction delays. Unable to counter these assertions, Nathan sought safer ground in evidence that Eves was exceeding the costs laid down in the contract with the Hong Kong government. By this time, with a tactic reminiscent of his successful effort to remove Low as the colonial secretary in the Gold Coast in favour of his own nominee, he had decided on an attempt to persuade the Colonial Office to repudiate the contract and to replace Eves with William Chatham, the colony’s director of public works, whom he considered more competent and who certainly, as a civil servant, would be more amenable to the Governor’s directions.

The Colonial Office would have no part of this conspiracy against the use of private enterprise in railway construction, a principle to which the Office adhered unswervingly in the period, but Fiddes admitted the force of Nathan’s plaint that ultimately the Governor would be held responsible for “any great delay or waste of money”. The consultant engineers compromised by sending out a replacement for Eves but Fiddes was plainly displeased with Nathan’s intervention, instructing Lugard in 1907 to put an end to the “sparring” between the government and the contractors and adding for the Secretary of State’s information that, since Lugard did not share Nathan’s zeal for railways, the matter could be expected to settle itself. Although Fiddes’s prediction was correct, so to a degree were those which Nathan had made about delays and growing expenditure, for the Hong Kong section of the line, begun two years before the Chinese section, was completed barely in time to link up at the frontier in 1911 and cost Hong Kong some 30 per cent more than the original estimate.

Nathan’s almost obsessional interest in the railway together with his peevish and overbearing manner towards the non-official director of construction, dominated his term in Hong Kong, taking up so much of his time that at one stage during the negotiations he considered that he was temporarily as busy as he had been in the Gold Coast. But the financial and diplomatic ramifications of the railway did not constitute his sole initiation into the mysteries of international affairs. With twenty consuls in the colony, most of them nationals of the countries they represented, Nathan had frequent occasion to use his fluent French, German and Italian, though as matters developed he might have been better served by a knowledge of Chinese, Japanese and Russian which, with American-accented English, were the languages most needed by local diplomats in the period in which he governed Hong Kong.
The United States consul had cause to pay a call on Nathan in 1905 for a purpose other than the usual exchange of cordialities, for the Chinese government declared a boycott on American trade in protest against the exclusion of Chinese labour from the United States. If the consul asked Nathan to ban a rumoured public meeting of Hong Kong Chinese residents in sympathy with the boycott, he failed to mention this in his report to the State Department, and Nathan made no reference to any such request in his despatch on the subject. It is possible that no more than a fear of local disorder arising out of a public meeting prompted Nathan to summon the two Chinese members of the Legislative Council for consultation about the strength of support for the boycott in the colony. Learning that the "respectable merchants", for whose interests in practice the Chinese representatives spoke, were opposed to the movement, Nathan issued a proclamation forbidding any public gathering to discuss the boycott. Since at this stage the railway negotiations with China were still deadlocked, Nathan's action was risky and, in the opinion of some at the Colonial Office, unwarranted by the circumstances or by the law of the colony. Alfred Lyttelton, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, shared these doubts about the wisdom of the ban and rejected the advice of those officials who wanted him to command Nathan for his "promptitude and sagacity", directing them "merely to acknowledge" the Governor's despatch. Nathan therefore had to settle for the gratitude of William Howard Taft, the United States Secretary of War, who passed through Hong Kong on his way to Peking to remonstrate with the Chinese government and privately thanked Nathan for his "friendly action".

If this episode revealed some disharmony between Nathan and his Downing Street masters, the credit he had earned with them in the previous year for his handling of a potentially more dangerous situation more than compensated, for he had then acted with such coolness and restraint that a senior member of the Colonial Office staff remarked: "I wish we had all our Governors as good at a crisis as Sir M. Nathan". "Crisis" was perhaps too dramatic a term to describe Hong Kong's situation during the Russo-Japanese war but several events gave Nathan cause to take prompt action and to demonstrate the kind of limited initiative which marked his Gold Coast administration. The war had begun before his arrival in Hong Kong and he inherited an incipient and localized economic recession when the tonnage of foreign shipping calling at the entrepot fell off. This recession proved to be the real "crisis" of his administration but of more pressing urgency in 1904-5 were questions of inter-
national law and local defence for which he was obliged to find quick answers.

The first of these problems appeared early in the war, when Russian refugees driven out of Port Arthur by the Japanese sought refuge in Hong Kong in September of 1904 and were interned by an embarrassed colonial government. Nathan wished that the Russians had sought sanctuary with their allies, the French, since the internees’ presence in Hong Kong cast some suspicion on the neutrality of Britain, pledged by the alliance with Japan to remain aloof if the Japanese declared war in the defence of their Chinese or Korean interests. Since Japan rapidly gained the upper hand in the war, Nathan decided that he could best serve the alliance by a scrupulous observance of the letter of international law on internment and contraband. The contraband issue arose when the Russian consul in Hong Kong, instructed by his government to assist the port of Vladivostok to overcome a Japanese blockade, formally petitioned Nathan to ease the policing of the Hong Kong harbour to its notoriously lax peace-time level. Nathan not only refused the request but increased the inspection teams at this indication that Russia would try to smuggle arms and supplies out of the colony.  

Not only as a potential smuggling centre but even as a British possession, Hong Kong seemed to its residents to be under threat of being engulfed in the wake of the Russo-Japanese conflict during the months of April and May, 1905. The Russian fleet, on its epic eighteen-thousand-mile voyage to the China Sea to do battle with the Japanese, was off southern China late in April and the British Admiralty warned Sir Gerard Noel, commander of the British China Squadron based on Hong Kong, that the Russians might attack the colony in an attempt to establish a staging post and to open it as a source of supply for Vladivostok. For six weeks the garrison stood to the harbour guns and the China Squadron cruised offshore, ready to repel an attack which never came, for the Russian fleet sailed direct from Cam Ranh Bay in French Indochina to its destruction by Admiral Togo in the battle of Tsu-Shima.

The removal of the short-lived Russian menace to Hong Kong carried deeper implications for the colony than Nathan suspected when with relief he recorded in his diary the annihilation of the Russian fleet. Rumours had already reached him that the Committee of Imperial Defence, successor to the Colonial Defence Committee of which he had once been the secretary, was likely to recommend a reduction of one regiment in the Hong Kong garrison as part of a pruning and redeploying programme. For once in total agreement
with General Hatton, Nathan objected that such a reduction would be "very dangerous" and backed his protest by pointing out that, since the colony paid a mandatory 20 per cent of its revenue annually towards the cost of its defence, justice as well as good sense demanded that its trade be adequately protected in an area which had so recently been disrupted by a war in which Britain had no direct part. Informed by the Colonial Office of Nathan's arguments, the War Office replied that the Committee of Imperial Defence had based its decision not only on a general need for economy but on the assumption that the Russian fleet would be destroyed, thus causing "a change of naval power in the Far East". Using his contacts on the Colonial Defence Committee, by then reduced to a sub-committee of the C.I.D., Nathan appealed to John Clauson, his successor as secretary of the C.D.C., but discovered to his annoyance that Clauson was powerless to help.

Apparently genuinely alarmed at what he saw as a serious danger to Hong Kong's ability to defend its commerce and its residents, Nathan resorted for the first time in his life to a veiled threat to resign "... unless I am convinced that the safety of the Colony is not imperilled". The Colonial Office were inclined to take seriously Nathan's "expert opinion", if not his resignation threat, and when, later in 1905, a regiment was withdrawn over Nathan's renewed protests, Lord Elgin, the new Liberal Secretary of State, undertook to discuss the matter with Lord Haldane, Secretary of War. Haldane stuck to the War Office view that, with the Russian fleet out of the way and with France unlikely to take the offensive alone in south east Asia, Hong Kong was safe enough with the garrison of 3,633 officers and men assigned to it. For Nathan, the coastal defence theorist trained to think in terms of firepower and fortifications rather than at the level of shifting alliances and the balance of power, this was not a persuasive argument. However he was obliged to swallow it and the Colonial Office heard no more of his resigning over the issue.45

Although the garrison issue had produced a rare accord between Nathan and Hatton, a purely local dispute between the colonial government and the army brought into the open the hostility they felt for each other and reopened an old breach between civil and military authorities in Hong Kong. The annexation of Kowloon in 1860 had been justified as a defensive measure and the local military authorities, wanting power without responsibility, laid claim to large areas of land on the peninsula without compensating the government for its use.46 When residential development by the end of the century
seemed likely to make the southern extremity of the peninsula as overcrowded as the island city of Victoria, the colonial government moved to redeem part of the military reserve for a public recreation area to be known as King’s Park. The War Office responded by placing on the land a valuation of 490,000 Hong Kong dollars, almost £49,000 at the 1905 rate of exchange, and May as acting governor wrote a scathing despatch condemning military rapacity. Having read May’s opinion before he reached Hong Kong, Nathan concluded that the army’s price was much too high for an area which was to be dedicated to public use and was in any case to remain available to the military authorities for occasional parades and manoeuvres.  

Although this indicated clearly that Nathan had jettisoned any lingering loyalties to the War Office and had aligned himself permanently with his Colonial Office masters, he was conscious of his chance, as a newcomer still with a foot in both camps, to work out a compromise. He therefore ignored May’s partisan objections to a War Office proposal to send out an officer to investigate. When this enquiry produced a report which supported the colonial government’s views, Nathan happily endorsed it and anticipated a settlement. But he had not reckoned with Hatton’s dogmatism and persistence; the general unearthed a previously overlooked 1895 agreement between the War Office and Sir William Robinson, then governor, in which Robinson in effect had conceded to the military authorities full title to the disputed lands. At this disclosure the Colonial Office backed down, Fiddes noting that “... we now haven’t a leg to stand on”. Nathan was “bitterly disappointed” but capitulated for want of allies. Consequently the eventual King’s Park was no more than a small enclave in military territory and inadequate for the recreational needs of Kowloon’s dense population.  

Nathan’s views on King’s Park were mostly May’s but his foresight about the prospects of population growth in Kowloon was sufficiently original for the long “conduit road” (now named after him)9 which he built from the coast to the almost unoccupied northern end of the peninsula to be dubbed “Nathan’s Folly” by his contemporaries.10 If he knew of this jibe Nathan was unabashed, for he looked to the day when industry attracted to Kowloon by the road would combine with the agriculture of the New Territories to protect the colony against fluctuations in the international trade on which in his time it was so heavily dependent. In 1905 there was so little industrial development even in Victoria that the Colonial Office List reported bluntly: “The island produces little or nothing”. The effect of the Russo-Japanese war on shipping calling at Hong Kong was
drastically to cut the colony’s revenues and there was little sign of recovery when Nathan left in 1907. Acutely aware because of his success in the Gold Coast that a governor must show the Colonial Office a solvent treasury, Nathan was so depressed that he called his administration “... in a most important sense ... a failure”. He could point to few successes in his search for a palliative. Even the project which had pleased him most—a flour mill established at Junk Bay in 1906—later closed for lack of custom. Hong Kong’s local “industrial revolution” had to wait until the 1930s for its take-off and it reached its limited and inherently unstable phase of maturity only during the postwar boom of the forties, with a flood of refugee labour from post-revolutionary China.

Despite his sense of failure, Nathan was startled at his unexpected transfer from Hong Kong in 1907. The Colonial Office had registered no displeasure with his struggle to balance the colony’s budget and Nathan assumed that there was a tacit understanding that the temporary recession would correct itself as Hong Kong trade returned to normal after the effects of the Russo-Japanese war died down. Under normal circumstances Nathan’s term would not have expired until 1909, with every chance of a renewal for a governor in whom the Colonial Office was as well pleased as Antrobus’s description of Nathan in 1906 as a first-rate official seemed to suggest. Fiddes, Nathan’s immediate superior at Downing Street, had strengthened this impression in a private letter to Nathan while he was in Hong Kong in which he said: “We love Governors who run their Colonies without having awkward questions, and so you are very dear to us”. In the period between this commendation and his virtual demotion to Natal, Nathan’s administration had raised no “awkward questions” but the Colonial Office found itself confronted with one for which the only available solution was to brush aside a “very dear” Nathan to make room for another governor whose temperament had been judged unsuitable for the Natal post to which Nathan was to be sent.

Two events outside his control in the latter part of 1906 decided Nathan’s fate. In October he suffered severe concussion in a polo accident and even after his recuperative spell of six weeks in Java the Hong Kong principal medical officer reported that, while there were no permanent effects on Nathan’s health, he was still too ill to work with his usual intensity. Meanwhile in July Sir Frederick Lugard had resigned as High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria after a dispute with the Liberal government over his scheme for “continuous administration” which was intended to allow him to spend half of
each year in England with his wife, the former Flora Shaw who until her marriage had been colonial editor of *The Times*. Lady Lugard had found Nigeria’s climate uncongenial and her influence, backed by the Colonial Office’s equivocal but real appreciation of Lugard’s talents, ensured that he would not be long unemployed in the colonial service. The problem was to find him a governorship senior enough to attract him and a climate suitable for Lady Lugard to accompany her husband. Since there was no such vacancy, one had to be created.

There followed a game of colonial musical chairs. Sir Henry Blake retired from Ceylon; he had just reached the age of sixty-five but since there was then no mandatory retirement age for governors it is likely, though not certain, that the Colonial Office took the initiative in Blake’s return. Immediately Sir Henry McCallum, who had made himself unpopular with his ministers in Natal when he criticized their handling of the 1906 Zulu rebellion, was kicked upstairs to Ceylon, whereupon Nathan was transferred to Natal to make way for Lugard. Francis May, who had turned down a promotion to the colonial secretaryship of Ceylon early in 1907, ostensibly because he wanted to continue working with Nathan but probably because he had his eye on the Hong Kong governorship, found himself with yet another master with no local knowledge.

Although he adhered on this occasion to his career rule of “never ask, never refuse”, Nathan was crestfallen and admitted in public that he felt “... somewhat in the position of a general at the close of an unsuccessful campaign”. Not only did the transfer mean a drop in salary from six to five thousand pounds a year but it implied an even greater loss of prestige, for the Natal governor had little nominal and, as he was to learn, less actual authority to direct his elected ministers. With some accuracy, though he did not know that Lugard’s preferment was the real reason, Nathan consoled himself and his mother with the belief that Elgin must have “some definite purpose” in sending him to Natal. Though he valued his reputation for coolness and discretion, earned in Crown colonies where the governor’s prestige was relatively free from the constitutional complexities of responsible government, Nathan might not have been altogether flattered to know that the quality which commended him to the Colonial Office as an appointee for Natal was the essentially negative one that he lacked the “quick temper” which, in Ommanney’s view, disqualified Lugard from governing a colony with an elected legislature and a responsible cabinet. Even if he had been told that his mission was to be a conciliatory one, he would have felt
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

scarcely less apprehensive than when, in his farewell letter to May, he reflected on McCallum's difficulties with his Natal ministers and prophesied with characteristic understatement: "I shall not have any easy time in Natal".59

A geographical aberration in his career, Hong Kong was nevertheless Nathan's zenith as an administrator and, despite its anti-climactic end, the period recurred in his later reminiscences as a halcyon time, especially when he was under pressure from assertive local politicians in Ireland, Natal and Queensland. With able and energetic subordinates, he was able in Hong Kong to create, for the first and only time in his overseas career, the role in which he was most comfortable, that of a painstaking and punctilious principal clerk, his desk in order and his books up to date. When Nathan attempted to recreate this role in Ireland, between 1914 and 1916, he came to grief in a crisis which not only threatened his ambitions, as Natal was to threaten them, with an imminent rebellion against that aggregation of loyalties to the empire and its political masters which constituted his personal credo, but actually confronted him with such a spectre. In Natal he was to face for the first time an overt challenge to Britain's moral suzerainty and to his own assumption that, as governor, he represented that higher wisdom; in the process he demonstrated a serious gap in his capacity to be "good in a crisis" and lost the Colonial Office's confidence in his steadiness under fire.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This private recommendation, in C.O. 129/324, N. to Charles P. Lucas, the Colonial Office principal clerk in charge of eastern colonies business, 15 Dec. 1904, met the same lukewarm reception as his similar proposal for the west African service (Ms. N. 313, N. to Antrobus, 15 Feb. 1903). The eastern service was not consolidated until the 1930s, when the climate of opinion on the professionalization of the colonial service had undergone a complete transformation.
2. Quoted in Perham, Lugard, II, 287.
4. On the 1894-96 agitation, culminating in the embarrassing necessity for the official majority to vote against the solid bloc of "unofficials" (two of them Chinese, and all nominated by the governor), see George B. Endacott, Government and People in Hong Kong, 1841-1962: A Constitutional History (Hong Kong, 1964), pp. 109-125. Extracts from the 1894 petition for representative government and the subsequent correspondence were reprinted in an anonymous pamphlet, How a Crown Colony is Governed (Hong Kong, 1896).
5. Minute by Ommanney on Selborne to Elgin, 27 Nov. 1906, quoted in Hyam, Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, p. 208 n.
6. On Pope Hennessy's Hong Kong administration, see James Pope-Hennessy,

7. Ms. N. 350 a, Blake to Lucas, 17 April (copy) and R.E. Stubbs, clerk in the eastern department of the Colonial Office, to N., 18 June (with a draft of N.’s reply, n.d.); Ms. N. 329, May to Lucas, 18 June 1904 (copy).

8. The dispute between May and Lucas over the deportations is in C.O. 129/322, May to Lyttelton, 24 March and Ms. N. 350a, Blake to Lucas, 17 April 1904 (copy). Nathan’s opinion on the need to enforce the ordinance and the Colonial Office reaction are in C.O. 129/329, N. to Lyttelton, confidential, 8 Sept. 1905 (and minute by A.J. Harding), and Ms. N. 328, N. to R.W. Mansfield, British consul-general at Canton, 12 July 1906.

9. Though not intended as a social history, Endacott and Dorothy E. She’s book, The Diocese of Victoria, Hong Kong: A Hundred Years of Church History. 1849-1949 (Hong Kong, 1949) leaves a clear impression of the strong social, and to some extent political, influence exerted by the Church of England and its adherents in a small expatriate community.

10. Ms. N. 330, E.S. Kadourie to N., 13 March 1905; Ms. N. 118, N. to Miriam Nathan, 2 April 1907. An example of Nathan’s carefully devised contributions to religious institutions was his donation of electric fans to the important Anglo-Chinese secondary school in 1906; see Gwenneth Stokes, Queen’s College, 1862-1962 (Hong Kong, 1962), pp. 78-79.


13. Ms. N. 117, N. to Miriam Nathan, 29 May 1906. The cancellation of the general’s dormant commission as governor is in C.O. 129/325, an exchange of letters between the War and Colonial Offices, 23 Feb.-12 March, 1904. Hatton’s correspondence with Nathan is in Ms. N. 333; the quotation is from a letter dated February, 1905.


15. Ms. N. 330, N. to Mrs Edith Antrobus (who proposed to set up a London-based organization to entertain colonial wives), 7 April 1905.


20. C.O. 129/325, Lucas to British and Chinese Corporation, 3 May 1904, a carefully phrased warning which Nathan had drafted for Lucas before his departure for Hong Kong.

SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

22. C.O. 129/331, F.O. to C.O., 15 June (enclosing a copy of a telegram from Satow, 7 June) and an exchange of secret telegrams between N. and Lyttelton, 26-28 June 1905.

23. Ms. N. 328, N. to James Scott, Mansfield's predecessor as consul-general at Canton, 13 March; Ms. N. 336, Satow to N., 4 May; Ms. N. 328, N. to Satow, 16 May 1905.


27. See Mongton Chih Hsu, *Railway Problems in China* (New York, 1915), p. 84.


32. C.O. 129/333, N. to Elgin, secret, 9 March (enclosing copy of telegram, N. to Satow, 9 March) and minute by Fiddes, 19 March; Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 22 March (enclosing copy of telegram, Satow to Foreign Office, 20 March 1906).


35. Ms. N. 328, N. to Antrobus, 25 March 1905.


39. United States, State Department, Hong Kong Consular Reports, 1905 (microfilm, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University), contains a general reference to the meeting with Nathan but it is described in terms which imply only that the consul reported the United States government's hope that Hong Kong would do nothing to assist the boycott.

40. Nathan's account of these incidents is in Ms. N. 117, N. to Miriam Nathan, 17 and 21 Aug.; C.O. 129/329, N to Lyttelton, secret, 8 Sept. and Ms. N. 328, N. to May, 9 Sept. 1905. The Colonial Office disagreement over Nathan's actions is in the minutes on his despatch by Harding, 9 Oct. A.E. Collins and H.B. Cox, 10


47. C. O. 129/332, May to Lyttelton, telegram, 4 March and confidential, 9 March 1904, and minute by Nathan, 7 May.

48. For May's view, see Ms. N. 341, May to N., 21 May and Nathan's notes of a conversation, 1 Aug.; for Hatton's objections, see Ms. N. 323, Nathan's notes of a conversation, 9 Aug. and Ms. N. 328, N. to Hatton, 21 Aug. 1904. Ms. N. 350a contains a typescript of the report by Col. J. F. Lewis, the War Office investigator. Robinson's 1895 despatch conceding the War Office's claims is reprinted in Hong Kong, Land Office, *Report upon the Military Reserve Lands at Kowloon and in the Colony of Hong Kong, and the Title to Certain Lots Situated Therein* (Hong Kong, 1898), p. 63.

49. Nathan Road is his only extant memorial in Hong Kong. In keeping with the dislike of public portraits and statues of himself which he had revealed in an angry letter to E. D. Morel in 1903 when his picture appeared in Morel's *West Africa*, Nathan declined the offer of a Hong Kong merchant to pay for a statue when he left the colony; see Ms. N. 340, May to N., n. d. [ca April], and Ms. N. 328, N. to May, 8 April 1907.

50. Endacott, "They Lived in Government House", an article on Nathan in the Hong Kong newspaper *The China Mail*, 26 June 1965.

51. Ms. N. 350b, speech to the China Association, Sept. 1907.


53. Ms. N. 332, Fiddes to N., 8 Aug. 1906.


55. See the ambiguous reference to Blake's term "coming to a close" by Sir Solomon Bandaranaike, a native of Ceylon and a friend of Blake, in his memoirs, *Remembered Yesterdays* (London, 1929), p. 128.

56. C. O. 129/339, N. to Elgin, telegrams, 26 and 28 Jan.; Ms. N. 340, letters to
Nathan from May and his wife, 23 April 1907.
57. Ms. N. 350b, typscript of Nathan's speech to the China Association, Sept. 1907.
58. Ms. N. 118, N. to Miriam Nathan, 2 April 1907.
While it was only in Ireland in 1916 that Nathan ceased to inherit other governors' rebellions and for the first time faced a rising against his own administration, Natal provided the first genuine test of the reputation for coolness and discretion in a threatened crisis which he had earned in the Gold Coast and Hong Kong. This Natal crisis, constitutional rather than military in its implications, left a query against his name in the minds of the Colonial Office which controlled his career prospects, and eventually led to his departure, after a decade of service, from the ranks of colonial governors. This blow to his pride could not be entirely assuaged by the official reason that the Colonial Office in 1909 suffered from "a surplus of military governors." In Natal, Nathan was to fall between two stools, for he satisfied neither his Whitehall masters nor his local ministers, and it proved an insufficient excuse that the demands made on him by these two camps were so irreconcilable as to defy even Nathan's temperamental inclination towards compromise.

Nathan's failure in Natal was relative, for he emerged from the crisis of the declaration of martial law in Zululand in December 1907 in much better odour with the Colonial Office, and indeed with a recent student of the period, than his predecessor McCallum. The failure was in fact a personal one, revealing overtly and for the first time in his colonial career an innate inability on Nathan's part to adopt a strong stand on principle and to take the consequences. He left London for Natal in 1907 with a clear determination to fashion a
compromise between Natal’s obsession with the safety of its European population and the “home idea of what is right.” While he admitted that “it is when a ruling democracy comes into close contact with a subject race that the inconsistencies of democracy and Empire become apparent”, his strong fear of the damage that a rebellion would do to his career guided his actions when he found himself faced with an inescapable choice between bowing to his ministers’ demand that martial law be proclaimed and his own conviction that the situation in Zululand was not grave enough to justify this resort to summary powers. While exposure to Natal opinion influenced his decision, his willingness to subordinate principle to expediency is apparent in letters he wrote to British critics of Natal even before he arrived in the colony. To P.A. Molteno, a South African who became a member of the British House of Commons and there belaboured his compatriots for their oppressive actions, Nathan wrote:

Your own idea is that there should be no imperial interference or assistance. Then the whites in Natal, not having the means of imposing their will on the natives, will have to avoid any action not acceptable to them. This recognises that the superior force lies with the natives but credits them with self-restraint in its exercise. Fortunately, in default of a definite solution of the race problem in South Africa, temporary compromises are possible and I trust that those that will be adopted in Natal will not be unduly repugnant to any whose feelings merit consideration.

Molteno was a zealot, with whom Nathan could only agree to differ, but with Winston Churchill, then the Liberal parliamentary under-secretary for the colonies and one of Nathan’s political masters, he appealed to his correspondent’s known capacity for changing his coat when ambition dictated. Although obliged by his portfolio to conduct a lukewarm defence of Natal in the Commons, Churchill had bitterly criticized the behaviour of McCallum and the Natal cabinet in Colonial Office minutes, sarcastically greeting the departing Governor’s description of the Zululand situation as “fairly flattened out” with the remark: “This despatch does justice to the wisdom and humanity that have inspired, no less than the beneficent results that have attended the native policy of the Natal government and Sir Henry McCallum”. Knowing Churchill’s views, Nathan wrote to him:

In this as in all political matters, what we know to be theoretically right we know also to be practically impossible and all we can hope for is to impress on a convenient opportunism some permanent if slight tendency towards a better state of things.
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

McCallum has been criticized paradoxically not only for his "autocratic temperament" but also for having "... proved very adaptable to Natal mores", so adaptable in fact that the Smythe ministry pressed Elgin to leave McCallum in Natal. McCallum apparently did not reciprocate this admiration, for he privately expressed his lack of confidence in Smythe, and there is a hint that Smythe's successor, Frederic R. Moor, was more conscious of McCallum's autocratic ways than of his sympathy for Natal attitudes in the prime minister's intimation early in 1907 that he "... did not in any way desire to place any difficulty in the way of Your Excellency's well-earned promotion [to Ceylon]". In contrast, H.W. Just, the official in charge of southern African business at the Colonial Office, voiced a general expectation when he minuted, and Elgin agreed, that, with Nathan about to arrive in Natal, "... we may expect to hear the result of his cool judgement of the situation soon".

Subsequent explanations of this Whitehall confidence in Nathan's ability to calm troubled waters in Natal rest on the assumption that he was "... chosen specifically for the position by Lord Elgin". This assumption rests on a phrase in Elgin's letter, written as he stepped down from the colonial portfolio in 1908, in which he thanked Nathan for his services in a difficult task undertaken "... at my request". Apart from the purely official acquaintance which lay behind this request, for at that time Nathan had not met Elgin, this phrase obscures the reality of the situation, when Nathan moved to Natal, which pivoted on the pressing need to find a suitable post for Lugard and his unsuitability for Natal. As against the autocratic proclivities of McCallum and Lugard, Nathan was thought to be better suited by temperament, and by the partial tutelage in government by consent which Hong Kong had provided, to the restoration of cordial relations between London and Pietermartizburg.

The situation which Nathan inherited fully justified his fear, expressed in his letter to Francis May as he left Hong Kong, that he would not have "... any easy time in Natal". Ticklish constitutional issues were revived by a rebellion in 1906, ostensibly led by Bambata, a minor chief, but believed by the Natal government to have been incited by Dinizulu, the successor of the celebrated Zulu kings who had created a powerful state and resisted settlement and British conquest in the nineteenth century. McCallum reluctantly acquiesced in the declaration of martial law and fought down some scruples when rebels were summarily executed under its provisions. As longstanding critics of colonial wars under Unionist governments, the British Liberals, swept to power on a landslide in 1906, were general-
ly suspected in the colonies of settlement of an intention to intervene in local affairs, and in turn McCallum and then Nathan were caught in the middle of a critical test of the Liberals' convictions on the question of “imperial interference” in the settlers' control of native policy. Embarrassed by what it saw as McCallum's passive surrender to local pressures, the Liberals demanded, on the grounds that imperial troops had been sent to Natal in response to the colonial government's plea, a direct voice in the post-rebellion settlement and forbade McCallum to sanction further executions of rebels. Angered by this attack on local initiative, the Natal cabinet resigned and the imbroglio threatened to develop into an imperial crisis when the federal government in Australia and the colonial ministry in the Cape Colony cabled to London their protests and demands for clarification. Elgin thereupon backed down, the rebels were executed and McCallum inherited the wind as the man in the middle of this confrontation between colonial aspirations and Liberal morality.13

Nathan might have escaped McCallum's difficulties if the Natal government had been content with its victory and prepared to settle for the suppression of the rebellion in 1906. But the white settlers were obsessed with memories of Zulu power in the nineteenth century and determined to eliminate root and branch the surviving vestiges of that old menace. Dinizulu, who symbolized that threat, had already undergone a long exile in St. Helena and returned to Zululand in 1898 in the role of induna (a traditional title which had come to mean, under the administrative system devised by Theophilus Shepstone in the nineteenth century, no more than a salaried chief) of the tiny Osuthu territory in northwestern Zululand. Even Sir Charles Saunders, Commissioner of Zululand and until 1906 Dinizulu's most influential defender in official circles, turned against him after the Bambata rebellion and advised Nathan that, for the sake of peace in the territory, the chief must be removed. Saunders' letters to and interviews with Nathan reveal the Commissioner's strong sense of bitterness at what he considered Dinizulu's betrayal in not having confided in him the news of imminent rebellion. Nathan's eventual adoption of Saunders' opinion, if not his air of outrage, demonstrated again his tendency, as with Stewart in Ashanti and May in Hong Kong, to be influenced in his judgement of local priorities by the man on the spot, especially if that man had a reputation as a "native expert".14 Saunders' advice, more than the urgings of his ministers, persuaded Nathan, after considerable hesitation, to sign the martial law proclamation, designed to maintain the peace in Zululand while Dinizulu was arrested.
Normally all any governor in a responsible government colony needed to do when faced by a request for such a proclamation was to satisfy himself that the gravity of the situation justified the resort to emergency powers. For Nathan, however, there were two obstacles, either of which alone might have given him pause; on the one hand he was not entirely convinced, despite Saunders' warnings, that there was any genuine threat of further disorder in Zululand; and his official instructions designated him as Supreme Chief, with "all political power and authority over the native population", and left with him "the ultimate decision" in any question involving the interests of the native population. In practice, this clause in the instructions was a dead letter, no Natal Governor having overruled his ministers by appealing to his powers as Supreme Chief; the Smythe ministry's resignation in 1906 had been directed against the imperial government's, not McCallum's, attempt to claim pre-eminence, or at least an equal voice, in settling the rebellion. Just's assistant at the Colonial Office noted that no governor had proved willing to prejudge his influence with the settlers by insisting on his right to the "ultimate decision" in native affairs, adding that in his own opinion the Supreme Chief's nominal powers were "... entirely inconsistent with responsible government". Nathan had no inkling that the Colonial Office was taking this line in internal minutes, for Elgin had given him no hint of a willingness to let the Supreme Chief's authority lie fallow and Churchill had intimated that he should take a strong line with Moor over the treatment of the Zulu. Therefore his decision to sign the proclamation, but to register his protest that it was not called for so long as there was no open breach of the peace in Zululand, endeared him neither to the Natal settlers nor to the Colonial Office, but especially to the latter, for, until the protest became public knowledge in Natal in 1908, the imminence of a constitutional crisis similar to that of 1906 was known only to Whitehall and the Natal cabinet. Consequently, when Nathan tried to avert trouble by following the despatch containing his protest with a telegram asking Elgin to express his sympathy with Natal's sincere desire to maintain order and "... put native affairs on a more satisfactory footing", Sir Frances Hopwood, the permanent under-secretary, remarked tartly that he saw no cause "... to bridge by platitude" the real differences of opinion between London and Natal. Elgin was even more blunt; if he sent the telegram Nathan wanted, he "... might as well at the same time forward my [Elgin's] resignation.".

Nathan was squarely trapped in the dilemma which had brought
McCallum a reprimand in 1906, except that, instead of an actual rebellion, there was merely consternation in Zululand at the re-imposition of martial law. With no rising to repress, there was no need for imperial troops and so no revival of imperial demands for a direct role in the settlement. This was a genuine piece of good fortune for Nathan, for Moor had asked for a battalion of British troops as a safeguard in September but later withdrew the request when Elgin reminded him that this would involve a *quid pro quo* in the form of consultation with London over the management of Zululand during and beyond any campaign in which the troops might be used.\(^{20}\) Saved by this from the inevitable rebuke he would have received if he had agreed to proclaim martial law prior to hostilities involving British troops, Nathan received the grudging approval of the Secretary of State, anxious now to avoid a repetition of the 1906 wrangles, and the admiration of the Colonial Office staff for his decision to seek a compromise between opposing his ministers’ wishes and following McCallum’s example by signing the proclamation without recording his official disapproval. Nevertheless, Just noted that Nathan’s solution of entering a formal protest would prove “awkward” when it became public knowledge in Natal and in Britain, though for diametrically opposed reasons.\(^{21}\)

At the time of the martial law proclamation, and even more obviously when he was asked by Elgin to agree to the publication of his protest against the proclamation, Nathan might have found another solution to his difficulties: he could have resigned. He had made a half-hearted move in that direction in Hong Kong over the far less vital issue of the reduction in the size of that colony’s garrison and it is therefore significant that he did not so much as consider resigning in December 1907, when the proclamation was placed before him. Then in Natal only a few months, he would certainly have risked condemnation on all sides for hastiness if he had offered his resignation, but in fact he did not even use it as a threat to rein in ministers whose actions he went on record as considering premature. Since he did not at that time think of resignation he naturally left no record of his reasons for deciding against such a step, though among them, it is reasonable to suppose, must have been a consciousness of his career situation, so recently shifted into decline by his removal from Hong Kong. That at least those in Natal circles who found themselves opposed to him on other issues suspected him of weakness when his career was in jeopardy is apparent from a remark by R.C.A. Samuelson, junior counsel at Dinizulu’s trial, who charged Nathan, in memoirs published twenty years after the event, with giving in to
his ministers for fear of “losing his bread and butter”. That bald accusation is unjust; in minor matters Nathan did in fact stand up against the cabinet and his real powers were in any case circumscribed by the constitution. In addition, on several subsequent occasions Nathan actually threatened to resign. What is most revealing about these events, nevertheless, is that the issues, though they superficially involved questions of principle, were far less vital than the irreversible decision in December 1907 to sign the proclamation of martial law. His threats to resign therefore reflected Nathan’s growing frustration at his failure to fulfil his intention, expressed to Churchill, of “impressing on a convenient opportunism some permanent if slight tendency towards better things”.

Nathan had good reason for this sense of frustration, as throughout 1908 his ministers obstructed his every attempt to influence them, and he voiced his disillusionment at the height of his troubles in mid-1908, when he quoted with approval in a letter to his mother the dictum of Lord Selborne, the South African High Commissioner and Governor of the Transvaal: “The position of a Governor in a Crown Colony is a very interesting one. The position of a Governor in a responsible government Colony is not a position for a gentleman”. Even before he had succumbed to the cabinet’s will by signing the proclamation of martial law, Nathan had run into the intransigence of Natal opinion on African aspirations and declared to his counterpart in the Orange River Colony the repugnance which this opinion induced in “a man of my former training”. He had tried to persuade the cabinet to release at least the less important of the more than three thousand rank-and-file prisoners from the 1906 rebellion; in October, 1907, he was sanguine enough to report that he had made some progress when Moor promised to free all but eighteen. But Moor procrastinated and over two thousand were still in custody when martial law was declared. In an obvious attempt to secure some advantage from his signature on the proclamation, Nathan extracted from Moor in November a “firm promise” that the prisoners would be released, taking the precaution of putting the undertaking in writing in a letter to Moor and reporting it to Elgin. But he had the mistake of recording the agreement in a private letter, requiring (and receiving) no acknowledgement from Moor. It was an error Nathan was later to regret.

Moor’s November “promise” was to be the first in a series of similar dishonoured agreements with Nathan. The Natal cabinet consisted of five members, the sixth (the Treasurer) having resigned in October over a taxation bill. From the outset Nathan preferred
Natal Moor to his colleagues, approving of his amiable manner and relative sympathy with the natives, but Nathan came to a critical assessment of the prime minister’s “feebleness, swayed from day to day by passing gusts”. In Nathan’s view, only Charles Hitchins, Minister of Railways and Harbours, shared Moor’s moderation and the stronger bloc was that formed by C. O’Grady Gubbins (Colonial Secretary), W.A. Deane (Defence) and particularly Thomas F. Carter, a powerful personality who as Minister of Justice was prominent in moves to eliminate Dinizulu’s supposed influence in Zululand and to assert the colony’s right to control its affairs irrespective of the imperial will which Nathan represented. This triumvirate persuaded Moor to deny that any promise to release the rank-and-file prisoners had been made and Carter especially was blunt to the point of discourtesy in his relations with Nathan over this and related matters.

At an Executive Council meeting in late December 1907, at which Carter was not present, Moor asked Nathan to tour Zululand in order to still rumours that the colonial and imperial governments were at loggerheads over Dinizulu’s arrest. Nathan was surprised at the request, since he had expected to be kept out of Zululand until martial law had been withdrawn, but he was anxious to see for himself that Colonel Duncan Mackenzie, commander of the Natal militia, was not abusing his powers. Consequently he went ahead with plans for a tour early in January. But Carter, backed by Mackenzie, objected strongly; Deane, who had been present at the December meeting, rallied to Carter’s side by insisting that Nathan had “misunderstood” the Council’s decision, and O’Grady Gubbins disingenuously proposed that the tour be postponed until the end of the wet season in April, when Nathan could travel free of the dangers of malaria and swollen rivers. A veteran of west African tours, Nathan was indignant at this slur on his hardiness and even angrier at the implication that he had lied about the Council’s deliberations. In support of his own recollection of what had transpired he quoted a telegram from Moor, by this time on vacation in Cape Town, which showed unmistakably that the invitation to tour had been extended and accepted. At this sign that Nathan would not relent unless overruled, the ministers gave up their crude attempts at duplicity and formally requested that the tour be put off until February, when Moor would be back in Natal to accompany the governor. Since the tour depended on cabinet cooperation, Nathan had to submit.

In this minor and purely local conflict an appearance of accord survived for public consumption but the disagreements over the
release of the 1906 prisoners, enmeshed in the bargain over martial law, grew into a prolonged struggle between Nathan and Carter and eventually became public knowledge with the printing of a British Bluebook in 1908. Nathan extracted from Moor early in that year an admission that the government had agreed to the release of the prisoners after Dinizulu’s arrest and not, as Moor at first contended, after the chief had been “dealt with” by trial and exile. But, as Minister of Justice, Carter was in a strong position to control events and he adopted an intransigent attitude to the release of the rebels and to Nathan’s constant reminders that the bargain had not been fulfilled. In one of these confrontations, at an Executive Council meeting on 28 January, Carter taxed Nathan with having accused the cabinet of a “breach of faith” and left the meeting when Nathan refused to “retract or modify that insult offered” (the latter part of the phrase in Carter’s subsequent minute to Moor is amended in Carter’s handwriting to “that serious charge”). Under this pressure Moor recanted on his admission to Nathan and joined Carter in asserting that no promise had been made.

Not satisfied with this victory, Carter pressed his advantage by trying to prove that Nathan was not merely misinterpreting the cabinet’s words but meddling in relations between the government and the Natal civil service. His evidence was a copy of Nathan’s secret despatch to Elgin reporting the cabinet’s withdrawal of its promise, which the Governor had “unconstitutionally” attached to a minute which passed through the hands of departmental officers. In a minute to Moor which rang with the triumphant note of a belligerent who has trapped his enemy, Carter advised the prime minister to consider “… what steps should be taken so that as regards the Secretary of State he should be truly informed of the full facts and of Ministers’ protest against his representative”. Translated from the formal language of constitutional relations this was a clear call for Nathan's resignation or recall. Either unaware of Carter’s implication or subtle enough to believe that the threat would force Nathan to back down, Moor sent on Carter’s minute to the Governor for his comment. Nathan sent it back, with the remark that it should never have been shown to him, and refused to be intimidated. But at an informal meeting in April he took the initiative himself by announcing to the cabinet that he would resign “… rather than write to the Secretary of State that Ministers did not promise to release rank and file of rebel prisoners when Dinizulu was arrested”. The threat was as futile as Carter’s, since it produced no more than a truce over the questions of resignation and release of prisoners and brought Nathan
no closer to his goal. The cabinet continued to dodge the issue and it was not until Nathan's last day in Natal, two years after Dinizulu had been "dealt with" by conviction on the charge of harbouring rebels, that the governor was able to sign warrants for the liberation of the last batch of 1906 detainees.  

Bickering over promises was not the only issue which raised the likelihood of Nathan's resignation or recall from Natal. His insistence on signing the martial law proclamation under protest hung like a sword of Damocles over his relations with the Natal government during the early months of 1908. Although Nathan's protest was not announced publicly until 1908 the London press got wind of it earlier and questions were asked in the Commons when the House resumed after a five month adjournment. The Colonial Office had already decided to publish a Bluebook in anticipation of parliamentary attacks on the Liberal government for its acquiescence in the martial law proclamation. Elgin wanted to include Nathan's protest as evidence that the governor, and the British government, had adopted a "correct attitude". Nathan was dubious about the wisdom of this decision, wondering whether it might not do "...more general harm than private good". He asked Elgin for a few days to think over the Secretary of State's formal request for Nathan's agreement, and took a full week to weight his own "private good" against abstract questions of honour and politique. Publication might easily lead to demands from Natal or from the British public for Nathan's recall on the grounds of defection from the interests of either party. Whether as an act of courage or as a calculated gamble he decided on agreement, informing Elgin that he wanted it to be known that in Natal "... the Civil Law is set aside without sufficient cause". He told Moor privately of his decision and offered his resignation. But he found Moor "strongly averse" to accepting the offer and he also received a stiff rebuke from Lord Selborne for his "self-conscious" action in offering to step down; in Selborne's opinion there were "no constitutional grounds for it whatever".  

A recent study of this period in Natal history suggests that it was not Moor's aversion to the offer but the unlikelihood that Elgin "...would have accepted the resignation of a man he had personally pressed into taking the position and with whose views the Colonial Office fully agreed" which settled the issue. Since Nathan did not forward his resignation to London this explanation must remain speculative, though it should be added in support of it that Churchill responded to a hostile question in the Commons, which referred to
the retention of a governor in Natal who had sanctioned a "blatantly oppressive" proclamation, by saying that Nathan was "... all the time ... exerting pressure on Ministers [in Natal] and gradually bringing them round". Though his stocks in London therefore remained fairly sound for the moment, Nathan's decision to withhold his resignation might have been influenced by his knowledge that governors who drew attention to their troubles tended to be passed over by the Colonial Office, as Cardew had been, or consigned to backwater oblivion, like Hodgson. He therefore took his medicine and it proved palatable; in Natal, where the revelation that the Governor was not in sympathy with settler fears of the Zulus might have been expected to produce a strong reaction, the newspaper comments were mild. The Durban *Natal Mercury*, an implacable opponent of the Moor government, depicted Nathan as the one cool head among a crowd of fire-eating advisers and even the Pietermaritzburg *Times of Natal*, which Nathan described as "... to some extent the government organ", chose to conclude that the Governor had correctly "... associated himself with his Ministers when action was imperative". The Pietermaritzburg paper preferred to find a scapegoat in Elgin, whose position it interpreted as "icily neutral".

Nathan's escape from public censure did not protect him from Carter's wrath and possibly increased it. The Minister of Justice complained that the Bluebook suppressed certain unspecified documents which he had wanted to include and, more damning of Nathan's role as intermediary, that it included others which the governor had promised to omit because they might prejudice the case against Dinizulu, technically *sub iudice* since 23 December, 1907, when a pre-trial hearing began in Pietermaritzburg. Predictably, Moor at first agreed with Nathan's assertion that the ministers had been kept fully informed of the Bluebook's contents but then agreed, on Carter's insistence, to lodge a formal protest with the imperial government. However, on this occasion Moor completed a double somersault by failing to submit the protest while Carter continued to complain as successive Bluebooks appeared—fifteen in all on Natal native affairs between 1906 and 1909, ten of them during Nathan's term—and contained what Carter described as "confidential reports ... published notwithstanding my protests". Eventually, in self-defence, Nathan himself reported Carter's protests to Elgin's successor, the Earl of Crewe, fearing that Moor's decision not to transmit them might result in a garbled and unofficial version reaching the Colonial Office. Crewe's reply completely exonerated Nathan but there was no apology from Moor when Nathan privately expressed
to the prime minister his indignation that Carter's complaints left a local suspicion of an imperial conspiracy "behind Minister's backs".\(^ {32} \)

On this note of stalemated sensitivities the arguments petered out. But there was more involved than wounded pride; the apparently petty quarrel was in reality a significant test of a governor's right to submit to the Colonial Office all the information on which he had based a decision involving his function as an intermediary between his imperial and colonial masters. The incident, tangential to the bigger issues of martial law and of justice for Dinizulu, was recognized nevertheless as a crucial test case by Sir Arthur Berriedale Keith, an eminent authority on constitutional law in the empire, who pointed to Nathan's action as an example of a governor's correct interpretation of standing instructions to imperial representatives in settler colonies. Though no objective witness, because of his implacable condemnation of any abdication of authority by Britain to "the third-rate politicians produced by petty Colonies", Keith could also damn a governor's weakness, as he did by blaming McCallum for "falling into a panic" in 1906.\(^ {43} \) However, Keith's assessment of Nathan as a "very prudent and moderate Governor" was not fully shared by the Liberal government in Britain, which knew, as did Nathan, that his decision to publicize his dissent from his minister's wishes on martial law and on the contents of the Bluebooks was a perilous step, both politically and personally. Shortly before the first Bluebook appeared Nathan confided to Lucas his sense of failure in Natal and his belief that he must either find some way into the ministers' confidence or throw in his hand.\(^ {44} \) Though seven months later he felt that, except for Carter, the ministers were "... rather better disposed" towards his advice since he had stood up to them on a matter of principle,\(^ {45} \) this impression was largely illusory.

The illusion stemmed from an element of self-deception in Nathan's assessment of his attempts to steer Natal towards "a better state of things" after the deadlock over the Bluebooks. A detailed study of Natal attitudes and actions in the area of native policy in the period before and during Nathan's term in the colony correctly credits him with sound intentions and a degree of success; while it was "... clearly impossible for him to change the underlying structure of Natal society, its racial attitudes or even most of its administrative practices", in contrast with McCallum he "... was, at times, able to prevail". Nathan's limited successes, it is suggested, were confined to those times "... when his views coincided with those of some of his ministers".\(^ {46} \) In the constitutional situation in which
Nathan operated, this was in any case to be expected, but it is reasonable to enquire under what circumstances a Governor who expressed his initial repugnance towards the racial attitudes of Natal settlers and of his ministers came to find himself in agreement at least with the more moderate elements in the colony; nor is this transformation in Nathan’s opinions to be entirely explained away by his willingness, expressed in his letter to Churchill before he arrived in Natal, to capitalize on any “convenient opportunism” he might find in his ministers.

On the questions of principle at stake during his term in Natal—those involving a recognition by London that Pietermaritzburg had secured a de facto initiative in the field of native policy and was prepared to assert the settlers’ de iure control of their own affairs—Nathan found the cabinet, including the “feeble” Moor, unprepared to compromise. It is therefore significant that it was in January 1908, when the Bluebook containing his protest against the martial law proclamation appeared, that Nathan first indicated in a semi-official letter to a Colonial Office superior his own awareness that he must be the one to relent, if he was to acquire a voice in Natal affairs. In the same letter in which he told Lucas of his frustrated attempts to overcome the parochialism of his ministers, he expressed the hope that “... with patience, and possibly the tempering of one’s views by environment, influence may come later”. This was not so much a prediction as a resolution: having weathered a series of crises which had started the ghost of resignation and an ignominious end to his chosen career, Nathan recognized that discretion, if not unconditional surrender to settler attitudes on race, was the better part of valour for the remainder of his term. There are clear indications from this time of a “tempering” of his views which reflected a conscious effort on his part to acquire “influence”, resting on his acceptance by Natal settlers as a sympathizer with their rationale if not entirely with their behaviour in dealings with Africans.

The degree of this shift in Nathan’s opinion of Natal racism can be assessed only if the attitude he brought to the colony, from his background as a member of a minority group and from his experience in other colonies, are taken into account. He had admitted to a shocked dismay at Natal oppression of the Zulus, even before the martial law imbroglio, and acknowledged that nothing in his “former training” had prepared him for such blatant hostility towards non-white peoples. His half-romanticized recollections of paternalistic feelings and actions towards the Ashanti led him to compare them with the Zulus, both of them being placed, in his
typology of subject races, above the educated and "trouserless blacks" of Freetown, Cape Coast and Calcutta, in the category of "gentlemanly savages". On grounds of wisdom as well as of humanitarianism, he first considered that Natal's white population was to be condemned for its illiberal policies towards the Zulus but, while retaining this belief that outright repression was contrary to the tenets of the Empire, he came slowly to sympathize with the "self-interest—which approximates to self-preservation" which was the dynamic, as he saw it, of settler hostility towards the numerically superior Africans.

After witnessing from the inside the powerlessness of London, and of himself as Governor, to moderate the overreaction of Natal to the mirage of imminent rebellion in 1907, he fell into a state of pessimism and even of disenchantment with the capacity of his generation to fulfil the high goals of the imperial mission. Against the implacable will of settlers whose attitudes and conditions of life differed radically from "the home idea of what is right", neither he nor a Liberal government in London could prevail. The European held parts of Africa "by force of arms ... for as long as he can remain strong enough"; although rule from Europe would last longer, and "the happiness of ruler and ruled [would be] increased", if it was exercised benevolently, it could not last for ever against the growth of political consciousness among the continent's residents, white and black alike. This view was a far cry from the orthodox confidence in the Empire's longevity and flexibility which Nathan expressed while in non-settler colonies in west Africa and Hong Kong, and it clearly reflects the insecurity of his own position in Natal; nevertheless, his new assessment of the nature and destiny of imperial rule did not convert him from his Gold Coast preference for direct rule to an advocacy of devolving real power on the Africans in preparation for the inevitable departure of their imperial rulers.

In public speeches in Natal, and in the preface to a book by a Natal observer published after Nathan's return to London, he urged a policy of "no political but every personal freedom" for the Africans and pressed for the segregation of the races, in order to allow each "... to develop on his own lines". In this prophetic phrase, as in his efforts to support the education of Africans so that they could be "... trained up to a generous measure of local self-government", Nathan emerged in his preface in full agreement with the author's segregationist views, asserting that "... contact between the races at an increasing number of points would lead not only to miscegenation which between persons widely differing in origin produces a weak
progeny, but also to degeneration in the white community ... and bitterness in the Abuntu who ... would be permanently maintained in a semi-servile position". Whereas his segregation schemes in the Gold Coast had been pragmatic designed to improve the health of the few white residents in coastal towns, this support for a thoroughgoing separation of the races in Natal was unequivocal, even doctrinaire, it reflected a shift in his earlier conviction, before he experienced Natal conditions, that "... practically the problem of black and white races living in one country without either oppressing the other is insoluble" to the bald statement that "... there will probably be general assent" to the idea that "... it will be more advantageous to both races if the natives are consciously developed on lines dictated by a study of their characteristics than on the assumption that their intelligences and natures are those of white men".

Nathan began only tentatively to swim with the local tide on the treatment of Africans and it needs to be emphasized that in his advocacy of segregation, and even more clearly of native education, he remained, even at the end of his term, at odds with the views of the most vocal Natal settlers, whose object was to exploit Zulu land and labour without deference to traditional rights or to long-term considerations about race relations. While he moved far from his repugnance concerning settler racism, Nathan's eventual stance was in accordance with the "temporary compromises" he had foreshadowed in his letter to Molteno in 1907, "... not ... unduly repugnant to any whose feelings merit consideration". Throughout the balance of his term he struggled intermittently and with a very limited success to fashion several compromises with his conscience and his conception of the Governor's constitutional duties as Supreme Chief. One of the few practical functions he performed in that role was to preside over meetings of the Natal and Zululand Native Trusts, the bodies responsible for the scattered locations and reserves in the colony. While Zululand was nominally reserved for Africans at the time of its incorporation in the colony in 1897, it had been unilaterally opened to settler penetration by successive Natal governments. A colonial Native Affairs Commission, appointed by the Smythe government to enquire into the causes of the 1906 rebellion and the effectiveness of native administration, reported shortly before Nathan's arrival. Among its recommendations was a strong warning against further alienation of Zulu lands.

Nathan protested when land sales to white settlers continued but Moor replied by drawing his attention to a proclamation, signed by McCallum in
1905, which authorized the alienation of land considered superfluous by the colonial government. The Colonial Office was surprised, since it recalled nothing of the proclamation, but Elgin noted: “I am afraid we must not expect too much from the Natal Native Affairs Commission”. Nathan was less easily persuaded. He persisted for a time in his efforts to stop alienation of Zulu land before surrendering to Moor’s refusal to be budged and to his own altering attitudes. Another conviction had succumbed to the overriding consideration of appeasing the white settlers.

In his exertions to bring about an overhaul of Natal native administration Nathan was even more persistent, though equally unsuccessful. In correspondence and discussions with local and visiting British politicians, he attacked the Native Affairs Commission for piously expressing itself in favour of “personal” government of a kind he had himself advocated since his Gold Coast days, but in fact proposing an administration which he regarded as “a singularly impersonal one”. The Commission had recommended appointment of four Native Commissioners with no more than local powers, leaving the oversight and direction of African affairs to a party-appointed official in Pietermaritzburg. Nathan’s arguments against the proposal were internally illogical, though he did not recognize his faulty reasoning; on the one hand he wanted native affairs “taken out of politics” by the appointment of Ashanti-style commissioners who were not liable to recall with every change of government, but he also proposed that the commissioners should be given the combined judicial and administrative powers which Stewart had wielded in Ashanti. What Nathan wanted was “4 Sir Charles Saunders and not one magnified Samuelson”. Apart from his false analogy with the non-settler area of Ashanti, Nathan overlooked the fact that his proposals would make the commissioners far more independent of the “Supreme Chief” than he really wanted them to be; and he also forgot the sycophantic ease with which Saunders had thrown off his mantle of protector of the Zulu when he had recommended Dinizulu’s arrest, thus giving the lie to Nathan’s contention that independent commissioners would automatically resist the demands of local hysteria.

Unconscious of his self-contradictions, Nathan continued to press for the creation of an impartial council to control native administration. He battled against a bill introduced by Moor which would have placed on the proposed council political appointees equal in number to the commissioners, thus keeping native policy squarely in the political sphere. Abandoning his earlier cries for commissioners with
full judicial powers, Nathan opposed a clause in the bill which specifically eliminated the right of appeal against their decisions, though there had been a limited right of appeal to himself as governor against Stewart’s judgements in the Gold Coast. Apparently he began to fear that the commissioners, whom Moor would have the sole power to appoint, would act less responsibly than the paragons his own formula demanded. But the lack of conviction in his protests surfaced when Moor insisted on retaining the no-appeals clause or scrapping the whole measure. For fear of being labelled in London and in Natal as the bill’s assassin, Nathan capitulated unconditionally.

As in the case of Nathan’s protest at the time of the martial law proclamation, the Colonial Office was not pleased about this equivocation. Just again noted that it would be “awkward” to publish Nathan’s early criticisms when the bill came up for royal assent. Fortunately for Nathan’s public image, though not for his standing at the Colonial Office, there was no demand for publication of correspondence on the bill. The Liberal government hesitated for four months but then gave the measure its imprimatur, mainly because of its knowledge that Natal native policy would be due for overhaul when the colony entered the imminent Union of South Africa.

Nathan set about trying to paper over the cracks in the new policy by securing the appointment of independent men as commissioners and as Secretary and Under-Secretary of Native Affairs. By this stage he had learned more about the art of compromise in Natal politics and his efforts were more successful. He had taken a strong aversion to Samuelson, not only because of what he regarded as the Under-Secretary’s submissiveness to Moor and Carter but also because of a personal grievance which had begun with the publication in the Natal government’s gazette of a memorandum by Samuelson which directly attacked all of Nathan’s arguments in favour of “personal” government of Africans. In retaliation Nathan persuaded Moor to pass over Samuelson and to name, as Secretary for Native Affairs, A.J. Shepstone, son of the celebrated Theophilus Shepstone who had been the architect of the long-standing Natal native policy which the new act amended. As Under-Secretary Nathan successfully nominated James Stuart, author of a semi-official history of the 1906 rebellion. But he had to compromise on the commissioners; he was unable to prevent the elevation of two former native magistrates whom he suspected of adherence to the old policies, and he could not move Moor from his determination to give another of the commis-
sionerships to a brother-in-law of Louis Botha, the Transvaal prime minister, even when Nathan protested bluntly that the choice was "clearly a job".60

There were several other stirrings of private conscience and a sense of public duty during Nathan's fitful struggles against a Natal attitude which, in essence, he was slowly adopting as his own. In the midst of the crisis over Dinizulu's arrest Nathan submitted to Moor a long minute enumerating thirteen Natal acts, ranging from identification pass regulations to penalties for failure to destroy noxious weeds, which he regarded as unduly discriminatory against Africans and in need of amendment or repeal. He also inveighed against the inadequacy of the education provided for Natal's African children, calling the colonial government's guiding principle—that the less a captive knows of his subjection the less likely he is to demand freedom—a "sort of lion-tamer's fear". While his recommendations were fully consistent with his axiom, "no political but every personal freedom" for the African, his successes were slight, amounting to no more than the repeal of two of the less objectionable measures which came into his category of state-made crime.61 On the application of punishment, however, he had a more significant success; Carter, the hard-line Justice Minister, confessed to his shock at the revelation of brutality which emerged when Nathan's persistent efforts resulted in an enquiry into flogging of Africans. While he deserves the credit he has been given for this conversion of a minister with whom on other issues he remained at odds,62 Nathan could not be sure that the minimal progress which followed the repeal of offensive legislation was attributable to his own efforts and it was his own state of mind as well as the condition of Natal he was describing when at the end of 1908 he described the outlook as "very depressing".63

These piecemeal attempts to tinker with native policy, while they produced a fractional improvement in the conditions of life of the Zulus, made no change in their status, either politically or socially, and Nathan's influence towards these changes may be considered significant only in comparison with that of McCallum. While such a comparison is clearly admissible as evidence of Nathan's relatively liberal intentions, it does not alone support the conclusion, drawn by Nathan and endorsed by a subsequent student of Natal policy in the period, that "perhaps as a result of his efforts, by the middle of 1908 Sir Matthew could note that 'public opinion in the Colony is certainly more active than it has been before to the necessity of dealing generously with the Natives'".64 During 1908 there emerged equally persuasive evidence that Natal opinion remained adamant on the
principle of local sovereignty in native affairs and that Nathan had arrived at an accommodation with that view. Under the double stimulus of their own imperial ideology and the pressure of those British humanitarian organizations collectively praised or deplored under the label "Exeter Hall", the Liberal government began to intervene in the conduct of Dinizulu's trial. Although he refused the plea from the extreme wing of Exeter Hall for the resumption of direct imperial rule in Natal in order to protect Zulu interests, Elgin conceded a promise to press the colonial government for an assurance that Dinizulu would be adequately and impartially defended. Exeter Hall engaged the services of the London barrister E.G. Jellicoe, a well-known sympathizer with liberal opinion in Natal who had already served as counsel for the celebrated Colenso family in their attempts to protect Zulu leaders against summary punishments during the 1906 rebellion. After a brief sortie to Pietermaritzburg, Jellicoe returned to London charging the Moor government with obstructive tactics and alleging that Nathan had agreed with him that "rumour-mongering" in the Natal press was prejudicing a fair trial for Dinizulu. Nathan indignantly denied that there was any common ground between him and Jellicoe, adding in support of the denial that he had been absent on his Zululand tour while Jellicoe was in the colony.65

Having thus aligned himself with the colonial government, Nathan repeatedly and with growing heat asserted in his communications with London that local counsel were competent to defend Dinizulu and that the Natal government was making adequate provision for the defence, both financially and in arranging for the collection of evidence. He did not sympathize with the attitude taken by Harriette Colenso that, in the cases against Dinizulu and against other Zulus more overtly involved in the disturbances, the colonial government had deliberately prevented defence witnesses from presenting their testimony.66 Churchill greeted Jellicoe's resignation as Dinizulu's senior counsel with the comment "Good riddance" but he also noted that the Liberals were "pledged to the hilt" to ensure a just trial and neither he nor Elgin would accept Nathan's assurance that Natal lawyers could handle the case impartially. When Elgin instructed Nathan to propose the name of W.P. Schreiner, a prominent Cape Colony politician and a King's Counsel, Nathan balked; he warned the Secretary of State that continued insistence on a barrister drawn from outside Natal would be construed in the colony as overweening imperial interference and as a reflection on the local bar. But Elgin was adamant and Nathan was obliged to comply with his superior's
wishes, though his personal reaction can be deduced from his action in sending on without the usual explanatory despatch his ministers' angry objection against having Schreiner imposed on them by London. In this losing battle Nathan consciously took Natal's part against London but in another dispute arising from Dinizulu's arrest he found himself unintentionally and embarrassingly allied with his ministers against an unyielding Elgin. Though he quickly regretted his slip and tried to make amends, it was too late for him to do more than to reproach himself for it. As an induna Dinizulu was entitled to a government salary of £500 a year, guaranteed under an 1898 agreement between Natal and the imperial government at the time of the chief's repatriation from ten years of exile in St. Helena—his punishment for implication in a Zulu "revolt" as chimerical as that of 1907. The Moor government decided to suspend payment of the salary from the date of Dinizulu's arrest in December of 1907 and Nathan raised no objection. He simply reported the decision to Elgin with the comment: "I presume I can give approval of this on your behalf". Elgin was angered by this presumption and drew Nathan's attention to the 1898 agreement with a demand for an explanation of why both the colonial government and the Governor were violating it. In fact, Nathan had acted from ignorance rather than from any conspiratorial intention. However, he could hardly confess this ignorance to Elgin, since as governor he bore full responsibility for any Natal transgressions against imperial rights. Consequently he tried to repair his oversight by pleading with his ministers to revoke their decision, but he ran up against the legacy of his earlier disagreements with Carter, who refused to cooperate. With his own approval already granted, Nathan had no leverage. He argued repeatedly, and on at least one occasion "heatedly", with the Executive Council but could secure no more than an undertaking that Natal would supply an unspecified sum for Dinizulu's defence, on the condition that the payment was not to be described as salary arrears. Throughout this fiasco, which ground on for five months, Nathan constantly remonstrated with himself for failure to act with "sound judgement" when the matter had first arisen and was relieved when Moor agreed to contribute to Dinizulu's costs. But once again Carter wielded his influence to modify Moor's "promise", demanding that its fulfilment be postponed until the legislature had approved the 1909 estimates which were to include provision for the payment. Since this would have meant a further delay of at least six months, the imperial government stepped in over Natal protests and ordered Nathan to
tell his ministers that the British exchequer would meet Dinizulu's salary arrears in full.

Nathan was alarmed at the colonists' certain interpretation of this as imperial interference. He protested, first on his ministers' request and then on his own initiative as Supreme Chief, that the Zulus would see the payment as evidence of a British belief in Dinizulu's innocence. This was a disingenuous argument, as Nathan's private letters reveal; he was far less concerned with Zulu than with settler opinion. He wrung from the Secretary of State an agreement to put off an irrevocable announcement until Schreiner had been approached with the suggestion that he should appeal directly to the Natal government for funds. But Schreiner would have no part of this arrangement, which would have left him dependent for financial support on the same authorities against whom he was defending his client. The Colonial Office then proposed a secret covenant under which the British contribution would be paid to the Natal treasury, so saving face for all parties, and—at an Executive Council meeting not attended by Carter—Nathan finally prevailed upon his ministers to accept the compromise. But he had no liking for it himself and told Lord Crewe that, in his opinion, the imperial government "... have gone quite as far as they ought in promising payment of eminent Counsel". Privately, he went further condemning Schreiner's "unscrupulousness" and contrasting it with what he regarded as his ministers' "restraint and desire to avoid friction". Even when the trial had ended, Nathan refused point blank Schreiner's request for publication of the secret agreement on the imperial payment, all of which had been absorbed in general defence costs, leaving Schreiner out of pocket.

This quarrel with Schreiner shows Nathan venting on a third party his growing irritation and anxiety over his failure in the role of mediator between Pietermaritzburg and London. The compromise on Dinizulu's salary left no party satisfied, and least of all Nathan, for it threatened to detract from his standing with the Moor government at a critical time, the middle months of 1908 when a conference was about to convene in Durban to consider the unification of the southern African colonies. Against this background, Nathan's bid for Natal's confidence was a dangerous gamble, since any publicity about the secret covenant might supply ammunition to the strong pressure group in the colony which opposed unification. But Nathan was not acting solely on his personal assessment of the risk; Lord Selborne, dedicated by this time to the achievement of unification, advised Nathan early in 1908 to do everything in his power to
dampen the ardour of the anti-union movement in Natal and especially “... not on any account to get into a position of friction with your Ministers”. Nathan felt by October, when the conference met in Durban, that his support on Dinizulu’s salary had earned him a little credit with the Natal cabinet and possibly enough to allow him a role in shepherding the colony into a union.

If Nathan came close in 1908 to trading away Dinizulu’s chances of acquittal for a modicum of personal pull with his ministers, he was even readier to give up his right to a voice in the destiny of Natal’s Indians. Always more of an Anglo-Saxon than a Jew while in England, he became in Natal more of a settler than a spokesman for this other suppressed minority. From 1860 Indians had entered Natal as indentured “coolies” on the sugar plantations and their numbers had been so swollen by free immigrants that towards the end of the century they exceeded those of the European settlers. This statistical superiority coincided with the arrival of the young M.K. Gandhi, who founded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 to awaken a political consciousness among his countrymen. Over the protests of the Congress Natal passed, in the first four years after receiving responsible government, three separate but cumulative measures discriminating against Indians: their right to vote in colony-wide elections was taken away; indentured labourers refusing repatriation or re-indenture were subjected to a £3 annual tax; and Indian traders were required to apply for licences and denied the right of appeal if their applications were rejected. The India Office was not completely powerless to stem this discriminatory tide, since it secured the shelving of a bill to forbid further free immigration by successfully proposing that immigrants be allowed to enter after meeting a simple educational test. But Indians were still the poor relations in a colony whose government was unmoved by Gandhi’s pleas for equal opportunity.

Fortunately for Nathan, the “Indian problem” (and Gandhi, who was almost synonymous with it) focussed on the Transvaal in the years immediately after the Boer War. Many Indians who had sought refuge in Natal during the war tried to re-enter the Transvaal, only to find Lord Milner’s government barring their way by enforcing an old Boer regulation requiring Indians to show documented proof of prior residence. Louis Botha’s government, taking office in March of 1907, stopped the trickle of re-entering Indians entirely. Natal thus became the base first for furtive border crossing and then for deliberate flouting of the Transvaal law by Indians openly courting arrest in protest.
Except for this minor embarrassment, Natal was relatively free from Indian disturbances during the years between the end of the Boer War and union in 1910. This comparative calm accounts in part for Nathan's official indifference to the plight of the local Indians, though the fact that they outnumbered Transvaal Indians by eight to one might have stirred a more zealous governor to intervene on their behalf. But in practice Nathan limited his exertions for the big Durban Indian population to a single piece of horse-trading, similar both in motive and result to his efforts for the Zulus.

Early in Nathan's term the Natal legislature was considering a bill to debar Indians from the municipal franchise just as they had been deprived of the right to vote in colonial elections a decade earlier. Nathan proposed to recommend royal assent if Moor would give Indian traders the right to appeal against rejection of their licence applications. Shady though this proposition might seem, it was consistent with Nathan's views on African rights and with his tolerance for Natal's Indian policy, which he regarded as "perfectly comprehensible and in the circumstances not unreasonable". Unprompted, he saw the analogy between the position of Natal's Indian merchants and that of Jews in London's Whitechapel, who were hated by the poor Anglo-Saxon traders whom they undersold. But his privileged beginnings and subsequent successes had weakened his sympathies with co-religionists from the wrong end of London; he confessed that the Englishman's suspicion of Jewish merchants was "very wrong and leads to much injustice" but regarded it as "quite natural in the undersold". In his view, the only solution to Natal's Indian problem was to stop all immigration, free or indentured, and to treat the remaining Indians as if they were Africans, eligible for "all social but no political freedom".

This defeatist attitude brought Nathan no censure at the Colonial Office, where opinion was divided on the degree to which the imperial government should bear the responsibility for expatriate Indians. The junior clerks, with an eagerness not shared by superiors weary from wrangles with the India Office, tended to disapprove of Nathan's abdication of duty in not opposing the disenfranchisement measure. However, the senior officials agreed with his prescription for the chronic hostility between the Indians and the white settlers in Natal and sanctioned his attempt to trade royal assent for a system of appeals on trading licences. But the India Office was wary of the proposed bargain and it seems that Nathan failed to press hard enough for it, for Moor confessed to a newspaper correspondent that he was "... not much distressed at the refusal of the home govern-
ment to sanction legislation directed against Asiatic licences". Despite the Colonial Office's support, Nathan did not clinch the bargain and the India Office threatened to retaliate against Natal by cutting off all recruitment of Indian labour. This threat struck home, for Moor had already withdrawn a bill to exclude indentured labour in the face of strong opposition from sugar and tea planters in the colony. In London in 1909 for the conference on the Act of Union, Moor bitterly protested against the India Office's threat which, if carried through, would endanger the colony's economy. But he would not amend the bill on trading licences and it fell to a half-hearted Nathan to press the India Office case in Natal. All he could extract from Moor was the postponement of the disenfranchising legislation. This merely deferred the evil day—or, as Nathan privately regarded it, the desired consummation—for in mid-1911 the Indian government stopped the supply of indentured labour to South Africa in protest against the oppressive policies of the new Union government.

Throughout these lengthy negotiations, when the few remaining rights of Natal's Indians seemed to be in the balance, Nathan remained aloof from the local community. Although he toured Zululand, the first governor to do so since annexation, and travelled widely to visit settler centres, he apparently showed no desire for an official visit to the Indian section of Durban and as governor saw no prominent Indians except those who came to him as a deputation in July, 1909, to plead for amendment of the union constitution to give the Governor-General power to reserve legislation affecting Indians. He took this petition so lightly, or was so glad of an excuse not to comment on it officially, that he left it to be forwarded by the acting governor while he went off on leave. Thus, except for his abortive efforts on trading licences, Nathan's sole effort to secure for Natal Indians that social freedom he professed to favour for them was his long and equally unavailing struggle to have an extra ward added to the Verulam Indian hospital. That he eventually gave up even this fight is a clear indication of his priorities, in which the welfare of the existing Indian community ranked well below appeasing the Moor government.

In the canon of British benefactors revered by Indians Nathan therefore finds no place but he acquired a reputation for sympathy and goodwill towards the aspirations of moderate African leaders, especially those whose background and current activity was in the Christian missionary sphere. His equivocation on the validity and effectiveness of Christian proselytizing in Africa, which had led him on
the west coast to defend the missionaries against Mary Kingsley's strictures while criticizing their failure to instil qualities of honesty and decorum in their converts, clearly underwent a transformation in Natal into a firm approval of the missions and consistent support for their efforts against the neglect and outright obstruction of the Natal government. Convinced that the settlers would never take the initiative in providing the men and money for the education of Africans "... trained up to a generous measure of local self-government", he gave practical evidence of his own belief in the value of the practical education in handicrafts and agriculture offered by the American Zulu Mission when he personally opened a school at Inanda, built by funds raised in the United States and run by the African missionary the Reverend John Dube. J.T. Jabavu, the prominent Zulu activist, praised what he thought was Nathan's warm sympathy with the Africans' aspirations and proposed him as the first Governor-General of the Union, and the Zulu-language newspaper *Imvo* described him as "the most able and brilliant ... enlightened and beneficent" Governor of Natal. There is in these plaudits the same element of favourable comparison with McCallum noted before—Dr F.B. Bridgeman of the American Zulu Mission found Nathan "a refreshing contrast to his predecessor"—which echoes Nathan's popularity with the Freetown Creoles on the grounds that he was "not Cardew". Nathan's axiom of "no political but every personal freedom" for the Africans scarcely met the aspirations being voiced by Jabavu and his supporters, though it coincided with the efforts being made by Dube and rested on Nathan's "somewhat novel" belief that any African franchise based on property and educational qualifications would persuade the settlers to continue with their practice of denying both to the natives.

On racial matters Nathan therefore emerged by the time he left Natal as a confirmed paternalist of the type of Lord Milner, who concluded after his southern African experiences that only after long tutelage under the white man, "elevated by many, many steps above the black man", might Africans rise "so far as to the level of [the European's] waist". While it would be anachronistic to condemn Nathan for his opposition to the complete enfranchisement of the African population of the Union of South Africa, it would be equally ahistorical to praise him for his willingness to resist the more draconian social consequences of direct contact between the races. Unlike his contemporary Sir Charles Eliot in the British East Africa Protectorate, Nathan faced in Natal the present reality of exploitation rather than the prospect of creating a white man's country. His con-
Natal

cclusion that only a system of residential segregation backed up by guarantees of the inviolability of African reserves could solve the “insoluble” problem created by white settlement, rested on what he saw as man’s original sin, “the sad fact that races like individuals are selfish.” Experience of Natal gave substance to this pessimism while causing him to pine for “the principle followed in the Crown colonies that it is the duty of the Government ... to do all in its power to raise [the natives] to the moral and intellectual plane of European civilization.”

Nathan’s faltering but final adjustment to the more moderate Natal racial attitudes brought him into fairly close agreement with Frederic Moor, who, for all his vacillation on specific issues under the pressure of Carter and public opinion, seems to deserve the qualified praise in a recent description of him as “the most sympathetic of the available Ministers of Native Affairs towards the African population.”

Nathan’s gradual adoption of the attitudes expressed in his more generous moments by Moor was of considerable significance in the Governor’s attempts to hasten Natal into a union of the south African colonies. Historians have differed in the weight they have given to the role played by the four colonial governors in this “closer union” movement, contemporary observers tending to overemphasize the influence of the imperial representatives and later analysts to play it down in favour of an interpretation which stresses the elements of local initiative and lobbying. With far greater resources, both scholarly and documentary, on which to draw, the recent accounts are more dependable but the reason for interpretive confusion is not difficult to discover. Proposals for unification in the nineteenth century, by Sir George Grey in 1858 and by Lord Carnarvon in 1875, had foundered on south African opposition to solutions dictated by outsiders and the British Liberal government in office from 1906 directed the governors to work behind the scenes during the 1907-1909 deliberations on unification. Though contemporaries saw this as an attempt to conceal the weight of imperial influence, Nathan and his colleagues were in fact facilitators rather than architects of the Act of Union.

The original impetus for union came from the so-called “Selborne Memorandum”, a document drafted largely by survivors from the celebrated “Kindergarten” of fervent young imperialists whom Lord Milner had collected around him during his term as High Commissioner. This 1907 manifesto outlined the political and economic advantages to southern Africa and to the empire to be gained from the

153
submergence of inter-colonial hostilities left over from the Boer War. Nathan was credited with “the first authoritative utterance” favouring the Memorandum’s proposals when, the most recently briefed of the governors, he spoke in its favour on arrival in Natal. His remarks and Selborne’s document, both made public a full year before the first session of a convention to discuss unification, constituted the sum total of official declarations on the subject. Thereafter the governors remained on the fringes of a movement to carry the principle of unification into practice.

Nathan’s contribution to the pre-convention movement was his success in dissuading the Natal cabinet from carrying out its threat to withdraw from the Statistical Bureau of the South African Customs Union, a body established in 1903 in the hope that it might smooth the path to political union. Natal’s public explanation for giving notice of withdrawal was that the colony was not getting its money’s worth from the Bureau but the real reason, as Nathan and Selborne knew, was Moor’s wish to put pressure on the Transvaal, which favoured union, for a modification of that colony’s modus vivendi with Portuguese Mozambique. That agreement, signed in 1901 and up for renewal as a formal treaty in 1908, entitled the Transvaal to recruit in Mozambique urgently needed labour for the Rand mines, in return for a railway rate on Rand traffic beneficial to the Portuguese ports and damaging to those of Natal and the Cape. Selborne was in a quandary over the treaty; as governor of the Transvaal he was acutely aware of the need for labour in the Rand mines but as High Commissioner for South Africa he needed to preserve the customs union as a basis for unification. He asked Nathan to persuade Moor that withdrawal from the Bureau would not help Natal but would certainly hinder prospects of union. Nathan duly extracted Moor’s undertaking to rescind Natal’s notice of secession from the Statistical Bureau. To a degree this joined the long list of Moor’s broken promises, since Natal never formally withdrew its notice, but Moor honoured his word in the breach, for he did not press the matter and it lapsed with Natal’s eventual entry into the Union.

Nathan’s compliance with Selborne’s wishes was in the line of duty rather than a sign of conviction, since he harboured strong personal reservations about the wisdom of union. Initially, at least, this doubt sprang from high-minded considerations rather than from fears for his own career prospects if South African governors became redundant, for he was still a Colonial Office favourite when he first voiced his opinions. He was willing to admit the force of arguments from Selborne, from Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson in the Cape and also
from Elgin that, from the colonies’ point of view, union was desirable, and even inevitable. But as a professed “imperialist” Nathan considered that south Africa’s unification would hasten the disruption of the empire by giving free rein to the Afrikaners, whom he suspected of an ambition to “cut the painter” and declare a republic. His reasoning rested on the assumption that the Afrikaners looked to Britain for nothing but defence—an echo of his old Colonial Defence Committee days—and that, as soon as south Africa seemed safe, they would tread down British south Africans’ imperial sentiments. The influence on Nathan of Natal’s anti-Afrikaner attitude is obvious and he found himself alone among south African governors in his pessimism.

Between them, Selborne and Hely-Hutchinson worked to woo Nathan from his heresy, though each had a different view of the British stake in fostering union. Hely-Hutchinson argued that Britain would be more deserving of Afrikaner confidence if she blessed the growth of “colonial nationalism”, which was in any case inevitable. Selborne called this argument “ridiculous to the last degree”, asserting that union under a strong constitution was “a question of trusteeship, which is the exact opposite of trust”. In the High Commissioner’s vision, Britain and the British settlers stood as the bastion against the danger of oppressive rule by Afrikaner majorities in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony. With Nathan, duty still overrode private doubts and Selborne’s passionate defence of closer union provided him with a rationale for participation in the movement which he used thereafter with every public appearance of full conversion, though he never lost his fears of Afrikaner domination and the subversion of British goals.

This suspicion did not evaporate even when Nathan discussed union prospects with Louis Botha, who charmed and persuaded so many English-speaking opponents. Nathan felt that Botha hid beneath his blandishments a threat of Transvaal economic pressure to coerce Natal into union. With his own perspective narrowed by contact with Natal opinion, Nathan disapproved of Botha’s methods but wrote to Selborne advising him to let the Transvaal prime minister “work out the thing in his own way”. Acting on the corollary of this advice, Nathan made it his goal to encourage Natal leaders to adopt a defensive attitude. On occasion he was to find himself insisting on safeguards for Natal sectional interests with a vehemence even greater than that of the colony’s official delegates to the union convention.

Nathan had ample opportunity to lobby for his limited cause.
Although the governors did not attend the convention sessions, they were free to travel at their ministers' invitation and could campaign privately for unification as long as their views were not too openly expressed as decrees from London. The convention met four times, once in Durban, twice at Cape Town and once in Bloemfontein; Nathan was on the spot at all except the second Cape Town session and was therefore on the fringes of more meetings than any other imperial official except Selborne.

It fell to Nathan as the Natal governor to deliver the opening address at Durban. His speech had an optimistic tone which was not reflected in his private correspondence; in a letter to his mother a week before the convention's opening he predicted that “... not very much will happen except exchange of discordant views”. He had sound reasons for anticipating deadlock, because for two months before the convention he had been arranging meetings between his ministers and a series of emissaries from the Transvaal—notably Patrick Duncan, a member of the “Kindergarten”, and Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, a Rand magnate and a leader of the British-oriented Transvaal Progressive Association. Nathan had witnessed the complete failure even of these eminently pro-British propagandists to convince Moor and his colleagues—and Nathan himself—of Botha's equitable spirit. On this experience Nathan rested his assumption that union prospects in general were poor. But he had overestimated the influence of Natal, which throughout the convention's proceedings was negligible against the combined weight of the Transvaal-Cape coalition fashioned in advance. Seeing this as a conspiracy against the English-speaking section of south Africa, the Natal delegates retreated into truculence and Nathan had reluctantly decided that he must try to talk them around to a more reasonable attitude even before Botha approached him with a request that he should do so.

The main subject of dispute at the beginning of the convention was the degree of centralization to be permitted in the union. As prime minister of a small colony Moor favoured a federation with strong provincial governments, on the Australian pattern, and with a federal government securing only those powers specifically delegated to it. Before he fell under the influence of Natal opinion Nathan had favoured a unitary state on grounds of efficiency but as his distrust of the Afrikaners grew he shifted characteristically to espousing a middle course. Knowing that the colony's delegates, even with the best of wills, would have difficulty in supporting abdication of all local powers by the Natal settlers, whom he depicted with marked under-
statement as "somewhat afraid of unification", Nathan joined with Hely-Hutchinson in working out the federal proposal which Moor presented to the convention. Although Hely-Hutchinson knew the Natal attitude well, having been governor of that colony from 1893 to 1901, his commitment to the federal scheme is suspect, for he had already declared himself privately to Nathan as a firm believer in a unitary constitution. He apparently cooperated with Nathan only in order to still Natal fears that it was to be hoodwinked into union, since he wrote to John X. Merriman, the Cape prime minister, that Nathan could be brought around by guarantees of Durban's trading interests *vis-a-vis* Mozambique.95

Hely-Hutchinson had put his finger squarely on Nathan's major ambition in the union discussions—the preservation of Durban's railway and harbour trade. This self-assigned mission explains Nathan's surprise and pleasure when his ministers invited him to accompany them to the first Cape Town session in November. He regarded himself as the only convinced advocate of Durban's interests, since none of Natal's five delegates came from that city, by far the colony's largest.96 Soon after his arrival Nathan had incurred the wrath of the predominantly rural Moor ministry when he received a Durban deputation which was campaigning for electoral redistribution and passed on their petition to London with the gratuitous remark that he expected his ministers to treat the matter "in a broad and generous spirit".97

Although no reform followed, Nathan continued to see himself as Durban's champion, calling its municipal council "the best Government in South Africa" and comparing it favourably with other Natal administrations, including Moor's.98 In a discussion with Fitzpatrick he extracted an undertaking that Durban would receive a third of the Transvaal railway trade after union, instead of its existing 24% share. The Transvaal government, of which Fitzpatrick was not a member, refused to honour the bargain, arguing for the *status quo*.99 Fitzpatrick was disgusted with the attitude taken by the Natal delegates whom he accused privately of caring "more for their commercial points, railways, Durban ports, etc. than for big things".100 Since none of the delegates represented Durban interests, this accusation must be directed mainly at Nathan and certainly he circumvented his own colony's politicians by calling on Selborne to secure Botha's word that Durban would receive no less than thirty percent of the Transvaal trade. Selborne complied101 and, forgetting his own experiences with the promises of colonial ministers, Nathan relied on this private assurance so completely that he did not go to
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

Cape Town for the reconvened session in January 1909, at which the trade arrangements were hammered out in informal meetings among the delegates. There Botha refused to write the railway agreement into the draft constitution and Natal had to settle for a vague clause committing the Union government to give effect “as far as practicable” to the division of the trade which gave Durban thirty per cent.\textsuperscript{102} Nathan declared himself satisfied, though he was irritated by Botha’s bargaining and even more by the Natal delegates’ failure to press the point.\textsuperscript{103}

Here Nathan was an unabashed supporter of a sectional, even of a parochial interest, though he acted in the belief that Durban’s prosperity was vital to the colony as a whole. On another issue he repeated, again with some success, his exercise in masquerading as the defender of Natal, “the only English colony” as he portrayed it in an interview with Basil Williams of \textit{The Times}, against the dilution of British virtues in a bi-racial union. In line with his unsuccessful proposal for a loose federation, Nathan lobbied vigorously at the first Cape Town session for the reservation of education as a provincial power for at least five years after union. Fitzpatrick told Basil Williams that the delegates from other colonies were unenthusiastic about this concession to Natal fears and that “… what induced them to give so much was Nathan saying that these Natal delegates [were] not leaders and if a cry were given that education was to be Dutchified the whole union might be wrecked, as it would give such a good cry to the anti-union people in Natal”. This version of Nathan’s influence, and of his opinion of the Natal delegates, was later confirmed by Selborne. Nathan himself considered that the concession meant there was “… now some hope of its [union’s] being accepted in Natal”.\textsuperscript{104}

Except for his single-minded pursuit of guarantees on trade and education, Nathan seems to have taken a close interest in few of the major issues at the convention, thus confirming Fitzpatrick’s impression that, like the Natal delegates, he did not care for “big things”. To some extent this impression may be misleading, since Nathan’s presence on the outskirts of most of the sessions left few records of his personal conferences with colleagues and delegates; in contrast, Hely-Hutchinson was present for fewer sessions and accordingly left a fuller account, in his letters to Merriman, of his views.\textsuperscript{105} From the fragmentary record in Nathan’s diaries and the cautious statements in his semi-official letters to Lucas at the Colonial Office, it appears that he successfully sublimated his forebodings about the long-term effects of union and worked sedulously to devise compromises
whenever Natal's suspicions threatened to produce a stalemate in the convention.

One of these efforts, well-intended though it was, seems decidedly fatuous in retrospect. The Cape delegates had thrown the convention into a quandary by insisting on the retention of that colony's comparatively liberal African franchise qualifications and by demanding their extension to union elections. Natal, as much as the two Afrikaner colonies, had no taste for giving Africans a voice in government, however hedged about by limitations. Moor asked Nathan to draft a compromise and Selborne submitted this scheme to a committee which sat in Durban after the other delegates had left. The plan rested on the principle of progressive enfranchisement of “civilized” Africans—a departure from Nathan's rule of "no political freedom" which he apparently felt no need to justify, even to himself. “Civilization” was to be assessed on four criteria: ability to speak a European language; regular employment or ownership of property of a certain value; monogamy; and “habitual wearing of European clothes or living in a house as distinct from a hut”. As if these prerequisites were not difficult enough to assess, Nathan further obscured his plan by adding a complex sliding scale of enfranchisement, with a first-generation “civilized” African receiving at the age of thirty a vote weighted at one-tenth of a European’s and his tenth-generation descendant achieving a full vote at twenty-one. To guard against lapses from grace, an impartial tribunal could take away the vote of any African “reverting to native habits”, whereupon his son would, at best, start again at the bottom of the scale.

This mathematical maze might have an appeal for a former military engineer with time on his hands, but it failed to commend itself to the busy social engineers on the franchise committee. One member disguised his apparent derision with the polite remark that the scheme was “interesting and original” but the committee passed over it rapidly to the recommendation that the Cape franchise should be entrenched in the constitution behind a two-thirds majority clause but excluding it from the other provinces. Nathan was disappointed and blamed the Transvaal and Orange River delegates for the scant attention his scheme had been given, ignoring the decidedly lukewarm advocacy it had received from Moor and the other Natal representatives, who proceeded at Cape Town to move unsuccessfully for the abolition even of the Cape franchise.

Nathan’s failure to carry Natal’s delegates with him on his own proposals was repeated in his efforts to persuade them of the wisdom
of schemes brought forward by others. The sole subject before the
convention in which the governors could openly intervene was the
future of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland, the three
“Protectorates” which—unlike Zululand—remained under varying
but real degrees of British control through Selborne as High Com-
missioner. Selborne was eager to see the Protectorates transferred to
the Union of South Africa, either at the time of unification or later,
but he and the British Liberals were unwilling to sanction the transfer
without specific guarantees, particularly of continuing control by the
Governor-General-in-Council. To represent the imperial view and
for personal reasons (he hoped to be appointed as the first Governor-
General), Selborne asked initially for permission to attend the
general sessions to state his views in the same observer status as that
given to Rhodesian delegates. Nathan “begged” his ministers to con-
sider Selborne’s request “from a British point of view” but failed to
budge them from a determination to exclude all imperial represen-
tatives. Consequently the fate of the Protectorates had to be settled
outside the convention chamber and consumed much of the gover-
nors’ time, interest and also—as matters developed—their reserves
of tact.

The effectiveness of the governors’ entreaties was reduced by their
inability to agree among themselves. This time not Nathan but Hely-
Hutchinson symbolized the sectional standpoint, no doubt under the
influence of Merriman. Nathan carried Moor, and Selborne per-
suaded the reluctant Botha, in favour of a plan to hand over the
Protectorates on certain conditions which included, in addition to ad-
ministration by the Governor-General-in-Council, the inalienability
of African lands and the exclusion of intoxicating liquor. Hely-
Hutchinson and Merriman protested against the proposal to
entrench these conditions in the constitution but Selborne predicted
that failure to do so would leave the Union government free to recant
on any gentlemen’s agreement. Again Selborne appealed for
Nathan’s support, while Hely-Hutchinson urged him to stay out of
the dispute. Echoing the Natal feeling that Merriman was not to be
trusted in anything concerning post-union policies, Nathan
responded brusquely to Hely-Hutchinson’s plea and complied with
Selborne’s request that he write to Lord Crewe supporting entrench-
ment of the Protectorate conditions. Nathan chose the winning side
in the argument, since the conditions were incorporated as a schedule
in the constitution and served for almost sixty years as a brake on
any British government tempted to unload the Protectorates by giv-
ing them freely to the Union of South Africa.
In supporting constitutional safeguards for the Protectorates, Nathan was going against what he knew to be the general Natal feeling. Moor had warned Nathan, while lending his cabinet’s support to the Selborne plan, that the Natal public would interpret it as an imperial vote of no-confidence in the prospective Union government. The risk Nathan took in ignoring Moor’s warning was amplified by the Moor ministry’s decision, alone among the colonial governments, to succumb to public demand for a referendum on the draft constitution. In March of 1909 Nathan refused an unofficial petition to dissolve the Natal parliament in order to allow an election to be waged on the unification issue but Moor had already settled on a referendum as a salve for the wounds of his increasingly unpopular government. The danger in this decision was that it afforded an opportunity for Natal’s powerful anti-constitution lobby to dredge up every conceivable objection in order to sway votes. Nathan recognized the peril but supported Moor on the grounds that a public airing of grievances was better than the risk of Moor’s defeat in an election at such a crucial stage.

In addition to general distrust of the “Dutch” and partisan opposition to Moor, there were in Natal several particular reservations about union: Pietermaritzburg stood to lose its prestige and power as a colonial capital; Durban was at first disappointed at securing only 30% of the Transvaal trade; the labor party deplored the omission of provisions for proportional representation; and the “imperialist” section denounced the entire constitution as a shady deal between Botha and the British Liberals. Three months before the referendum Nathan summed up the situation in a letter to Selborne in which he said that nowhere except in the predominantly Afrikaner northern districts of Natal was “sentiment” in favour of union; it was “… now a matter for each part of the country calculating the gain or loss likely to result from adhering”.

Although he could not take part in the public discussions about the referendum, Nathan did what he could by “talking privately with those whom it may be useful to influence with regard to it” and by inserting in his speeches on other subjects some oblique references to the dangers of isolation. He considered that Moor and his colleagues were irresolute and he approached on his own initiative such adversaries of union as P.A. Silburn, of the “imperialist” bloc, and J.G. Maydon, a prominent Durban merchant who had turned against the constitution because he considered that the Transvaal’s renewed Mozambique treaty was an act of treachery by Botha. Although he failed to convert Maydon, Nathan counted on a dawning recognition
in Durban of the wisdom of grabbing a bird in hand, even if it was a little leaner than the city had hoped for.

But Durban’s charge of heart seemed slow in coming and Nathan grew increasingly apprehensive about the referendum’s likely result. At the suggestion of Thomas Watt, a Convention delegate and an opponent of Moor, Nathan decided on an attempt to put some ginger into Natal’s union advocates by asking Crewe to cable a reminder that the imperial government would give its consent to the constitution even if any one of the colonies rejected it. Crewe complied and, although the imperial intervention was not decisive, it gave the proponents of union a chance to renew their propaganda about the loss to Natal of the Transvaal trade if the colony decided to go it alone.

Nathan was sufficiently encouraged by this revival of spirit to take a rosier view of the referendum prospects, calculating that Durban votes would carry the day against Pietermaritzburg opposition. His final forecast, based on his own observations and the reports of his ministers, was 10,468 votes for and 5,936 against. This proved an un­duly pessimistic assessment, since 11,121 “yes” votes were recorded and only 3,701 opposed union, with a majority in favour in every constituency, including Pietermaritzburg. Over his lingering fears of imperial dissolution Nathan’s gratification at the referendum result sounded through in his request that Crewe send a telegram expressing the British government’s pleasure—a cable which the Natalians saw as a spontaneous expression of London’s sentiment but which was really a reflection of Nathan’s relief that his colony had not been the straying lamb.

Nathan’s satisfaction with his part in shepherding Natal into union was dimmed by an almost simultaneous resurgence of wrangles over Dinizulu’s trial, which ended in March, 1909. Disputes over the imperial contribution to the defence costs clouded Nathan’s last year in Natal and his standing with the Colonial Office. While R.C.A. Samuelson, Dinizulu’s junior counsel, was uncharitable in his charge that Nathan sided with his ministers on this issue for fear of “losing his bread and butter”, there is a curious and uncharacteristic inflexibility in Nathan’s continued insistence on the correctness of the Natal stand once the reason for his fears of imperial “interference”—that it would prejudice the colony against the un­ification movement—had been removed by the referendum. It was as if he was determined to regain a reputation for consistency, whatever the consequences for his popularity in Whitehall, after the evidence he had given of wavering under fire when the question of
Dinizulu’s salary had first arisen. Nevertheless, as in Hong Kong, his fall in Colonial Office esteem must be deduced largely from the treatment he subsequently received at Whitehall’s hands, the official minutes on his despatches remaining generally approving until the end of his term. But once the question arose of Nathan’s future after union, when the constitution would abolish the South African colonial governorships, Nathan ran for the first time into the wall of polite rejection erected in the Colonial Office against governors who had outstayed their welcome.

While the systematic shift towards professionalization of the colonial service from top to bottom took place between the two world wars, the piecemeal policy of appointing as governors those officials whose careers had been spent wholly or mainly in that service, rather than in the army or navy, continued to be applied in the decade after Nathan went to Sierra Leone in 1899. Then ten of his forty-two counterparts had begun their careers in the military services; eleven years later the number of posts which he might have considered (and might have been considered for) had been reduced to twenty-five, seventeen of them held by governors who were recognizably professionals and eight by former military officers. There was a “surplus of military governors” to be provided for by the Colonial Office and Nathan found himself a supernumerary. He clutched briefly at a rumour that he was to be made Governor-General of the amalgamated Nigerian colonies but Crewe quickly disabused him of this bright hope, informing Nathan that he was merely under consideration for one of the existing Nigerian governorships—“2nd class!”, as Nathan noted disgustedly in his diary—which were shortly to be downgraded even further to lieutenant-governorships after the Nigerian amalgamation. Nathan declined even to be considered for such a post and, offending openly for the first time in his colonial career against his rule of “never ask, never refuse”, petitioned instead for the governorship of Madras, under the India Office. Turning without scruple to influential friends who, like the Clarkes in his War Office days, might save him from uncongenial employment or worse, he approached Charles Hobhouse, a Member of Parliament and an old acquaintance of the Nathan family. Hobhouse told him that he had no chance of Madras—he did not say whether Nathan’s indifference to India Office pleas for Natal Indians counted against him—and undertook only to commend him to Sydney Buxton, the Liberals’ Postmaster-General, who offered him the post of Secretary of the Post Office in the home civil service.
Nathan was on his knees. Resumption of his army career was by this time out of the question, since after ten years' secondment he was automatically placed on the reserve list. Even more damaging was the ill-will he had aroused at the War Office when in 1907 he had wrung from it a promotion to brevet lieutenant-colonel for "exceptional services other than in the field" which the army had been very reluctant to recognize. In the same year Nathan had refused a private offer from Sir George Clarke, who wanted to retire as secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, to put forward Nathan's name as his successor. Two years later Clarke's reasoning must have sounded depressingly prophetic to Nathan: 119

You are still so young that a spell of 3 years (say) in England could not in the least prejudice your future and might even give it greater lustre. You would be brought into contact with the men who rule for the present, and the knowledge of your great capacity would extend far beyond the C.O.

With genuine reluctance, Nathan had to settle for the Post Office. Most of his hesitation stemmed from his real devotion to the colonial service; in a letter to Lord Crewe written after he knew his fate, he wrote: "I cannot suppress the hope that the severance is not a permanent one though I recognize that very generous provision has been made for me". 120 But some of his regret is reflected in the phrase concerning this "generous provision": the Post Office appointment carried a salary of only £2,000 a year, far below that of all but the most obscure colonial governorships, and financially Nathan had fallen into fairly deep waters in Natal. The Colonial Office had formed the impression when it appointed Nathan to the Gold Coast that he "... could afford to be, and is, indifferent as to money". Obviously Nathan had then been at pains to emphasize his qualifications as a "gentleman", dedicated to the public service and unconcerned about monetary rewards. His mother, who had often come to his aid with gifts from the modest fortune left to her by Jonah Nathan, was in 1909 on her death bed and unlikely to leave each member of her large family a substantial bequest. While Nathan had managed to save from his Hong Kong salary and allowances, he had several times owed money to his private secretary in Natal, despite the £5,000 a year he was paid, because of the drain of entertaining the settlers, more numerous than the European population of Hong Kong and equally covetous of Government House invitations. To add to his difficulties, Nathan had sold £1,5000 worth of assets in 1907 to raise the wherewithal to purchase the manor house at West Coker in Somerset 121 and, although it was let to tenants, that symbol
NATAL

of his gentlemanly status long remained a drag on his limited resources, further depleted by his regular and relatively generous contributions to charities. Not only to evade the ignominy of unemployment but also because he needed the salary, Nathan was therefore bound to clutch at the Post Office straw.

Depressed rather than bitter at the Colonial Office's uncharitable desertion, Nathan returned to Natal in October 1909 for three months of anti-climactic application to chores, clearing up a backlog of acts requiring royal assent, successfully pressing for the final release of the 1906 rank-and-file prisoners, and making farewell tours of the colony. He told his mother, presumably in an attempt to console himself as well as her in her final illness, that the Natal public seemed sorry to see him go. But the tone of valedictory articles in the Natal press was restrained in comparison with those which had lamented his departure from Hong Kong. The African Monthly dwelt on his contribution to local horticulture—an avenue of trees in Pietermaritzburg is one of his few surviving memorials in Natal—before proceeding to pontificate in general terms about the new Union's loss of imperial statesmen who had served the colonies so well.

Nathan personally felt few regrets at his severance of relations with the Natal people and government. He had long considered that settler society was "singularly uncultured". In a letter to his mother, he said: "I sometimes think that they would enjoy themselves more with Mrs Tammas and William [his housekeeper and coachman] than with us". On the political level, he continued to believe that "far too much of the time, energy and money of the small community of the colony seems to be taken up in governing themselves badly", an opinion shared by later analysts of the Natal government's performance before Union.

Never having hoped in vain, like Selborne and Hely-Hutchinson, for the Governor-Generalship of the Union, Nathan was the first of the four governors to hand over his commission and he did not share the sense of local rejection with which these more politically minded colleagues took their leave of South Africa. For the last five months before the Act of Union took effect, Natal's Governor was Lord Methuen, who thus affirmed the old saw about old soldiers never dying but merely fading away, his main distinction in South Africa to that point having been his capture by the Boers in 1902. At the age of sixty five Methuen had his brief taste of vice-regal glory, while continuing as commander-in-chief of imperial forces in South Africa, and Nathan at forty-eight took up his modest post in St.
Martin’s-le-Grand Street in London, where he devoted himself to decisions on whether telegrams were better delivered by telephone or by messenger and on the virtues of employing female labour in post offices. His hopes for a return to the overseas service he preferred, despite his admiration for the quality of the home civil service, were strengthened by the knowledge that his predecessor at the Post Office, Sir H. Babington Smith, had also spent most of his earlier career outside Britain, the useful connections he had made in London eventually securing him a foreign service appointment.

There remained the old obstacle of Nathan’s Jewish faith. In Natal he had applied the same formula as in his earlier postings, neither denying nor warmly embracing his co-religionists, and the device had proved acceptable to the Jews of Natal, one of whose leaders had earned Nathan’s gratitude even before he reached the colony by asking his approval of the Durban Hebrew congregation’s intention to associate itself with the public welcome rather than to arrange a specifically Jewish ceremony. He took a Durban synagogue seat but, as in London, used it rarely and unceremoniously, in contrast to the pomp attached to the arrival of nominally Christian governors for Sunday services at colonial cathedrals. Ironically, there was a brief moment in 1911 when Nathan’s faith seemed likely to become a career bonus, for there was a rumour that he was to be posted as British Resident in Egypt, the newspaper which picked up this false trail commenting wryly that this would make him “the first Jew to take a prominent part in the government of that country since the administration of Joseph there, a matter of 4,000 years ago”. The Egyptian prospect proved as illusory as two earlier rumours: a report in 1910 that Nathan was to be the next Viceroy of India and another in 1903 that he would be the first governor of a proposed Jewish settlement in the British East Africa Protectorate. Winston Churchill, a warm supporter of Zionist aspirations in his years as Elgin’s Under-Secretary, had gone from this office in 1908 and could do nothing to help Nathan, even if the Jewish settlement had materialized and he had felt inclined to assist a governor whose colony had given the Liberals so much trouble.

Thus, 23 December, 1909, when Nathan left Natal for the last time, marked the end of a decade in the colonial service and also of his reputation as a “first-rate” governor. By the canons of sound performance as laid down by the Colonial Office and accepted by Nathan as pronouncements ex cathedra, the devil’s advocacy of Natal had triumphed over the evidence of good works which Whitehall had seen in his Crown colony administrations. Largely un-
tested in those colonies where the European residents wielded influence but no power, Nathan's reputation for discretion and decisiveness had suffered when he wavered in Natal between loyal support for London's views and his qualified but unmistakable adoption of the settler standpoint. All that remained completely unsullied by his Natal experiences was the high estimation which Whitehall placed on his administrative efficiency, a quality appropriate in an official whose Post Office duties, like those he had performed for the Colonial Defence Committee, required him merely to execute, and never to initiate, policies and procedures handed down from above. When Nathan privately confessed to some sorrow at leaving South Africa "... at a moment when so much appears to be hanging in the balance", he provided a suitable metaphor to describe the prospect of his ever achieving again the prestige and power he had once held as a colonial governor.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ms. N. 373, C.A. Harris, principal Colonial Office clerk in charge of protectorate affairs, to N., 30 June 1909.
2. Shula Marks, Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906-8 Disturbances in Natal (Oxford, 1970), contrasts Nathan favourably with McCallum (pp. 340-41) and in her description of the constitutional crisis in 1907-8 notes: "References to Nathan's able handling of the situation are frequent both in C.O. files and in letters to Nathan from Elgin and Sir Charles Lucas" (p. 262n).
3. Ms. N. 368, quoted in Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, p. 190.
5. C.O. 179/241, minute by Churchill, 4 June on McCallum to Elgin, telegram, 1 June 1907.
7. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, p. 341.
12. Ms. N. 371, Elgin to N., 27 April 1908.
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

17. Ms. N. 42, Nathan’s brief diary entry concerning his interview with Elgin, 4 June, and Ms. N. 246, a detailed record of his discussion with Churchill, 18 July 1907.
18. C.O. 179/242, N. to Elgin, telegrams, 3 Dec. (martial law proclamation and protest) and 6 Dec. 1907 (plea for expression of “sympathy” with Natal’s intentions).
19. C.O. 175/242, minutes by Hopwood, 7 Dec. and Elgin, 8 Dec. on N. to Elgin, telegram, 6 Dec. 1907. It is notable that both Just and Lucas, 7 Dec. favoured Nathan’s proposal as a means of soothing Natal fears of imperial interference but that Elgin’s politically motivated refusal ended all debate on the question.
27. Ms. N. 360, Nathan’s notes of Executive Council meeting, 23 Dec.; Ms. N. 119, N. to Miriam Nathan, 9 Dec. 1907, and 5 and 12 Jan. 1908; N.A., Prime Minister 105, Deane to N., and N. to Moor, 30 Dec.; Prime Minister 70, O’Grady Gubbins to N., 31 Dec. and N. to O’Grady Gubbins, 1 Jan. 1908.
29. Ms. N. 360, Nathan’s notes of Executive Council meeting, 23 Dec.; Ms. N. 119, N. to Miriam Nathan, 9 Dec. 1907, and 5 and 12 Jan. 1908; N.A., Prime Minister 105, Deane to N., and N. to Moor, 30 Dec.; Prime Minister 70, O’Grady Gubbins to N., 31 Dec. and N. to O’Grady Gubbins, 1 Jan. 1908.
31. Ms. N. 362, N. of meeting, 16 April 1908.
34. C.O. 179/249, Elgin to N. telegram, 4 Jan. 1908.
36. C.O. 179/249, N. to Elgin, telegram, 10 Jan.; Ms. N. 43, diary, 10 Jan.; Ms. N. 368, Selborne to N., 11 Jan. 1908. The relevant Bluebook is Cd. 3888 (Jan., 1908).
38. 4 *Hansard*, CLXXXIV, 197-8.
40. *Times of Natal*, 30 Jan.; *Natal Mercury*, 31 Jan. 1908. The two remaining newspapers in Natal, the *Natal Witness* (Pietermaritzburg) and the *Natal Advertiser*, took the same line as *The Times of Natal*, letting Nathan off with a veiled warning against “interference”.

168
41. N.A., Prime Minister 105, Carter to Moor, 25 Feb. and Moor to Carter, 25 and 27 Feb. 1908. N. had noted in Ms. N. 43, diary, 7 Jan.: "Ministers were with me from 2 to 6 while I read them all Dinizulu despatches with regard to their publication in Bluebook".


44. Ms. N. 368, N. to Lucas, 19 Jan. 1908.

45. Ms. N. 120, N. to Miriam Nathan. 15 Aug. 1908.

46. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, p. 342.

47. Ms. N. 368, N. to Lucas, 19 Jan. 1908.

48. Ms. N. 368, N. to Goold Adams, 14 Sept. 1907.

49. Ms. N. 368, N. to Sir John Rodger, his successor as Governor of the Gold Coast, 17 Sept. 1907.

50. Ms. N. 368, N. to John Shepstone, 31 Jan. 1908.


53. Nathan’s preface to Maurice S. Evans, Black and White in South East Africa: A Study in Sociology (London, 1911), pp. vii-x. Nathan’s speeches in Natal, which demonstrate his gradual adoption of the position taken by Evans, are in Ms. N. 360.

54. Ms. N. 368, N. to Molteno, 31 July 1907; preface to Evans, Black and White, p. ix.


57. Ms. N. 368, N. to Col. H.E. Rawson, a member of the Natal Native Affairs Commission, 29 Sept. 1907. S.O. Samuelson was Moor’s Secretary for Native Affairs. See also Ms. N. 362, Nathan’s notes of a discussion with H. Ramsay Collins, editor of the Natal Mercury, 20 March 1908.


60. Ms. N. 366, N’s notes of conversations with Moor and of Executive Council meetings, 15-22 June; Ms. N. 368, N to Moor, 17 June and to Carter, 19 June 1909.


64. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, p. 342n, quoting Ms. N. 368, N. to Elgin, 23 May 1908.
65. Jellicoe's charges and Nathan's reply are printed in Cd. 3889, pp. 78-81 and 91-105.
66. See the Colenso papers, Rhodes House, Oxford University, Mss. Afr. s. 1295, Harriette Colenso's appeals to Nathan to delay the execution of two prisoners found guilty of the murder of Mpumela, 29-30 April, and Nathan's refusals, 30 April and 3 May 1909.
67. The correspondence concerning Schreiner's appointment is contained in C.O. 179/244, N. to Elgin, telegrams, 31 Jan., 14, 17 and 28 Feb; Elgin to N., 20 Feb.; Churchill's minutes, 4 and 11 Feb.; and in Elgin's private letter to Nathan, 14 Feb. 1908 (Ms. N. 371).
68. The protracted correspondence between Nathan and the Colonial Office on Dinizulu's salary is in C.O. 179/244-48 and 252. Nathan's private views are in Ms. N. 362, notes of conversation with Moor, 7 March; Ms. N. 43, diary, 30-31 May and 17 Nov.; Ms. N. 119, N. to Miriam Nathan, 31 May, 2 June and 2 Aug.; Ms. N. 368, N. to Lucas, 12 and 16 July 1908, and N. to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, governor of Cape Colony, 21 Jan. 1909. Nathan's assessment of Schreiner is in Ms. N. 368, N. to Lucas, 24 Jan. 1909; and his correspondence with Schreiner is in N.A., Govt. House 482, Schreiner to N., 15 and 18 Jan. and 30 March and N.'s private secretary to Schreiner, 18 Jan and 26 March 1909.
72. Ms. N. 368, N. to Lucas, 3 Oct.; C.O. 179/242, N. to Elgin, 8 Oct. 1907. Nathan was still advocating the end of immigration a year later and by then was proposing also that the imperial government should "... aid Natal financially to turn out all Asiatics, compensating them well"; see Basil Williams notes of a discussion with Nathan, 24 Oct. 1908 (Ms. Afr. s. 133, Rhodes House, Oxford University).
73. C.O. 179/245, N. to Elgin, 8 May 1908, and the contrasting minutes by the senior officials Just and Hopwood, 5 June, and junior clerks R.H. Griffin, 2 June, and W.A. Robinson, 4 June.
77. N.A., Govt. House 1559, exchange of minutes with Moor, 4 May 1908—25 Nov. 1909.
78. See Evans, Black and White, p. 118; Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, pp. 341-42.
79. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, pp. 341-42.
80. Ibid., p. 348.
82. Ms. N. 368, N. to Molteno, 31 July 1907.
83. C.O. 179/244, N. to Elgin, 6 Jan. 1908.
84. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, p. 262.


89. Ms. N. 368, N. to Hely-Hutchinson, 10 May; to Elgin, 23 May; to Selborne, 31 Aug. 1908.

90. Ms. N. 373, Hely-Hutchinson to N., 13 May; Ms. N. 377, Selborne to N., 15 Sept. 1908.

91. Ms. N. 368, N. to Selborne, 28 Nov. 1907.


96. All five were rural M.L.A.'s, three being farmers and the other two lawyers with country town practices; see *The Natal Who's Who* (Durban, 1906) and the *Natal Civil Service List, 1908* (Pietermaritzburg, 1908).

97. N.A. Govt. House 1042, Moor to N., 9 Oct.; C.O. 179/242, N. to Elgin, confidential, 11 Oct. 1907. On the gerrymandering of the Natal electorate, which gave the two cities eight members for a combined electorate of 9093 and the smallest rural district two members for 595 voters, see the contemporary pamphlet *Redistribution in Natal: Declaration of Rights and Historical Statement* (Durban, 1908).


SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

105. See Thompson, *Unification*, in which these letters are used to reconstruct Hely-Hutchinson’s opinions and his influence on the Cape delegation’s actions at the convention.
106. Thompson (*Unification*, p. 222) incorrectly attributes this scheme to Selborne, although his source (Walton, *Inner History*, pp. 147-49) states that “... it probably did not originate with Lord Selborne”. The original draft, referring to the plan as “my proposal”, is in Ms. N. 368, N. to Moor, 20 Oct. 1908, thus confirming the impression (Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, p. 348n) that the “curious scheme ... apparently originated with Nathan”.
108. Ms. N. 368, N. to Moor, 3 Nov. 1908.
113. Ms. N. 44, diary, March-April, 1909, *passim*; Ms. N. 368, N. to Selborne, 4 June, describing Nathan’s arguments with Maydon.
117. Ms. N. 373, C.A. Harris to N., 30 June 1909. The total of twenty-five governorships analyzed here from the information in the 1910 *Colonial Office List* excludes three categories for which Nathan, by his own preference or the existing pattern of appointment, was virtually ineligible in that year: the three “fortress” colonies; the surviving governorships in the dominions, generally held by aristocrats or men of local eminence, only four of which were manned in 1910 by ex-military officers (two by generals, one by an admiral); and the commissionerships and residentships which he would certainly have declined as beneath his notice and his needs. The still erratic nature of the Colonial Office’s practices in selecting governors is illustrated by the fact that in the period 1907-1910 four senior governors were replaced: Sir J.A. Swettenham (Jamaica) was a professional, succeeded by another professional (Sir Sydney Olivier); Sir Henry Blake (Ceylon), a professional, retired and was followed by Sir Henry McCallum, a former soldier, though an experienced governor by 1907; Sir Henry Jackson (Trinidad), an artillery officer who had governed three colonies, gave way to Sir George Le Hunte, whose entire career had been spent in the colonial service; and Nathan was supplanted by Methuen, also a soldier though, as a serving general, by far his military superior.
118. Ms. N. 44 (diary), 18 July 1909. The rumour that Nathan would be preferred to Lugard for the prestigious Nigerian appointment was passed on to him by Roderick Jones, a Reuters correspondent who toured with him in Zululand in 1908.

119. Ms. N. 156, Clarke to N, "most private", 21 July 1907.

120. Ms. N. 368, N. to Crewe, 19 Aug. 1909.

121. Ms. N. 42 (diary), 9 Aug. 1907. Nathan's private account books for Natal (Ms. N. 367) show him with a credit balance, on his three and half years as Natal Governor, of £156 in March, 1910.


123. See, for example, the cool editorials in The Times of Natal, 20 Aug. and the Natal Mercury, 14 Oct. 1909.


125. Ms. N. 368, 12 April 1908.

126. Ms. N. 368, N. to Lucas, 15 Sept. 1907. Cf. the description of Natal's "parish pump and railway branch line politics" in Marks, Reluctant Rebellion, p. 19, and the opinion of Zbigniew A. Konczacki, Public Finance and Economic Development of Natal, 1893-1910 (Durham, N.C., 1967), p. 129, that "... in spite of the efforts of some well-meaning officers of the government and members of Parliament, the administration of the fiscal system of the Colony left much to be desired".

127. Ms. N. 368, N. to L. Hart, secretary of the Durban Hebrew congregation, in which Nathan said: "I entirely appreciate and concur in the reasons that have led them to consider that I should prefer the members of the Jewish community joining in the general welcome ... to their organizing any special demonstration of their gratification at my appointment".

128. The Yorkshire Observer, 28 April 1911 (Nathan family album of newspaper clippings).

129. The Madras Mail, 16 Feb. 1910 (ibid.).

130. The Daily News (London), 16 Sept. 1903; Ms. N. 310, Donald Stewart to N., 13 Oct. 1903. There is a reference to Nathan's name having been "... often mentioned as a possible governor for the proposed Jewish colony" in the study of this abortive scheme by Robert G. Weisbord, African Zion: The Attempt to Establish a Jewish Colony in the East African Protectorate, 1903-1905 (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 291, note 61. Elgin insisted that the governor be British and offered "... to look for him among Jews in the British service if there was a qualified person" (p. 238).


132. Ms. N. 368, N. to Colonel C.P. Crewe, a Cape Colony Unionist M.P. with whom he had corresponded extensively during the union negotiations, 5 Jan. 1910.
England and Ireland, 1910-1916

"I detect no indication of a 'rising'"

From Natal in 1909 Nathan took with him to London little more in terms of prestige than his almost automatic elevation two years earlier to the highest rank of his order of knighthood (the grandiloquently phrased "Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George" which hid its light under the bushel of the title "Sir" and the letters G.C.M.G.). Loyal friends assured him that the Post Office would be no more than an interlude in an ever-flourishing career in the public service but such laurels as he had earned abroad carried minimal weight in his new sphere of activity, the home civil service. For members of this breed, Nathan had long felt an admiration bordering on the special awe he reserved for the dedication and efficiency of the Indian Civil Service. Like the army, these two elite services had begun in the nineteenth century to recruit potential executive officers by means of an entrance examination approached, in its rigour and emphasis on the rather unvocational curricula of the universities, only by the eastern colonial service towards which, in Hong Kong, Nathan had also conceived a somewhat awestruck sense of admiration.

Having threaded his way past this entrance examination through a loophole known as "clause seven", which permitted the appointment of senior administrators from outside the ranks of the civil service provided the responsible minister supplied a certificate of exemption from the requirement for special qualifications, Nathan was at once under suspicion as a protege. The Civil Service Gazette preserved a
venerable of gentlemanly politeness, simply noting that the new Secretary of the Post Office had "... commenced well ... and is likely to prove a success," but the privileged testimony given before a Royal Commission on the Civil Service revealed a marked hostility towards his appointment. Sir Robert Chalmers, whom Nathan succeeded as chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue in 1911, admitted, under direct questioning about Nathan's appointment, that there were "anomalies" in the selection of senior officials; and Nathan's successor at the Post Office responded brusquely, when his own opinions on administrative reform were contrasted with Nathan's, that he had spent thirty years in that branch of the service and Nathan less than two. Pointedly interrogated by the Royal Commission on his qualifications for the Post Office and Inland Revenue positions, both involving a familiarity with the collection of public revenues, Nathan replied defensively that as a governor of Crown colonies he had been responsible for finance and added, in a comment which might serve as a personal justification for his peripatetic career: "... it seems to me not wholly disadvantageous to a public department to be administered by someone for a time who has not been trained in it, and who is able to compare it with other administrations".

For a brief time, Nathan's rapid advancement in the home civil service became a symbol of anachronistic jobbery. Even The Times, which could hardly be depicted as an irresponsible irritant on the rump of the socio-political establishment, dwelt disparagingly on the cases of Nathan and two other "outsiders" as undesirable exceptions to the rule of promotion from the ranks of the civil service and there was some parliamentary play with the facts of patronage adduced by the Macdonnell Commission. Ironically the attack in the Lords was led by Selborne, Nathan's former chief in South Africa, who expressed the Unionist belief that, in the colonial as well as the home administrative services, senior appointments should be given to officials whose careers had been spent solely or largely in those services. While attesting to Nathan's "remarkable ability", which had left on the colonial service a "permanent influence ... very much to its advantage", Selborne expressly disapproved of a statement in the Commons by Colonel Seely, the Liberal Under-Secretary for the Colonies, that governorships lay "... quite outside the ordinary course of promotion in the Colonial Service". In the Commons the Unionists persistently pressed the government to make a statement of intention as the testimony before the Macdonnell Commission appeared, documenting cases of patronage appointments. When
the Commission’s report finally appeared, condemning as “anachronistic” and “disheartening” the appointment of officials whose previous careers suggest no obvious qualification for the duties … concerned, a member of the opposition in the Commons asked whether the government intended to “… observe strictly the letter and the spirit” of the Commission’s recommendations. David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, answered that the question was “under consideration”, the usual phrase cloaking protracted parliamentary delay, and there the matter rested once the outbreak of the first world war made civil service reform a low priority.

Within a period of fifteen years, Nathan was therefore transformed from a shining example of the unconnected outsider’s triumph over the “old boy net” to a symbol of dubious jobbery. It must have been small consolation for his sense of personal injustice at this reversal of roles that each of the political parties disputing his claim to preferment had acted in turn as his patron, the Unionists having plucked him from the army to place him in a colonial governorship and the Liberals having installed him in the increasingly guarded echelons of the senior civil service. Nevertheless, the apolitical (or at least bi-partisan) image created for him by the public parading of his record was a useful reputation for a civil servant hoping for further advancement. It remained for him to cultivate the personal acquaintance of the men “who rule for the present”, a necessity of which he was reminded in 1913 by the man who six years earlier had advised him to consider a return to the War Office, where such cultivation of contacts was easier than Nathan had found it while serving in remote colonies. George Clarke, Nathan’s old mentor on the Colonial Defence Committee, was elevated in 1913 to the peerage as Lord Sydenham of Combe, after a period as a governor in Australia and India, and he wrote to Nathan recalling his earlier advice that London was the place to seek out influential friends and anticipating that in time Nathan would follow him into the Lords, just as he had emulated his example in moving from the War Office to the colonies.

The dignity of a peerage was such a remote objective for an official who had recently moved from a post as the nation’s premier postman to the even less popular one of chief tax-collector at the Board of Inland Revenue that Nathan must have smiled at Clarke’s optimism. There appeared to be few opportunities for public distinction in these purely administrative positions, although both gave to Nathan, for the first time since his Colonial Defence Committee days, the
gratification of a personal regime into which the demands of high policy rarely intruded. A later Secretary of the Post Office, whose career was spent entirely in that branch of the civil service, described his responsibility as extending to "the whole organization of the department and the efficient working of its services" and depicted his office as the "the G.H.Q. of the Post Office [where] all matters of policy and questions of more than local application are dealt with". This is a rather grandiose representation of the realities of British civil service procedures in the early twentieth century, when—whatever may be claimed for the "statesmen in disguise" whose professional competence has occasionally led to their opinion prevailing over that of their ministers in more recent times—the Post Office Secretary found himself subordinate not only in principle but in practice to the politically-appointed Postmaster-General.

It was Nathan's good fortune, a coincidence supplemented by his temperamental preference for administering rather than making policy, that he was not long obliged to serve under Sydney Buxton, a man whom he did not know personally and who had given him the Post Office appointment only on the representation of Nathan's friend Charles Hobhouse. In a cabinet reshuffle in 1910, Buxton moved to the presidency of the Board of Trade and the young Herbert Samuel, one of the early crop of British Jews who had acquired the social stamp of an Oxford education and had accordingly risen from relatively humble origins to enter the cabinet in the previous year, became Postmaster-General. The first professing Jew to reach such political eminence, Samuel was acquainted with the Nathan family through his religious affiliation but was not before 1910 a personal friend of Sir Matthew, with whom he subsequently worked to reform a Post Office practice of annually dismissing about four thousand messenger boys at the age of sixteen, thus saving on wages but creating one of the most notorious exploitations of child labour still surviving from the nineteenth century. This crusade earned Nathan a measure of publicity, his name (and on one occasion quite a flattering caricature of him garbed as a kind of super-postman) appearing in the press in the context of laudable social concern. Thus, despite its relatively low ranking in the hierarchy of senior civil service positions, the Post Office secretaryship offered the chance of some useful exposure to the public gaze in a period when, as a recent scholar of post-Edwardian English history has put it, a citizen "... could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman".
extra-curricular service on a number of investigating committees, some of them (notably a commission preparing plans for a Pacific cable service) drawing on his acquaintance with military and colonial requirements.

Praiseworthy though all these labours were, none of them was likely to bring him the acclaim and social acceptance which were necessary if he was to restore his career to its former eminence. However, Nathan was not long to be lacking in influential friends who, like the Clarkes at the War Office two decades before, might rescue him from official obscurity or even oblivion. In Charles Hobhouse, an old friend and currently financial secretary to the Treasury, and Herbert Samuel, his departmental superior and co-religionist, he already had the confidence of political men of influence who might introduce him into the social ambit of the Liberal cabinet, headed since 1908 by Herbert Asquith and centred on his prime ministerial residence at 10 Downing Street. There remained the hurdle of Nathan's Jewish origins which, if not insuperable once Samuel had shown the way to a reconciliation of faith and political success, was still a potential obstacle for Nathan, lacking the badge of a university education. There are some signs that, once he was away from the scrutinizing gaze of colonial population, Nathan became slightly more regular in his attendance at the New West End Synagogue where his mother had helped him to purchase a seat twenty years earlier. But his preference continued to be for the work of bridge-building between creed and citizenship of the Anglo-Jewish Association, which he rejoined on return to London. His interpretation of his religious duties remained eclectic, as is obvious from his having joined in the Christian morning prayers at a weekend house party in Ireland in 1912.

Nathan's presence at this house party indicates the extent to which his efforts to overcome the handicap of religion and social obscurity had been crowned by success. Herbert Samuel took Nathan to Downing Street, proud to display another member of his faith who had climbed out of the commercial background which ensnared British Jews a generation earlier. Soon the Post Office Secretary found himself dining there regularly in his private capacity at the invitation of Asquith's wife, to whom his courteous and charming manner with the ladies commended him. Although Asquith and his wife were for Nathan never more than social acquaintances, he quickly developed with their daughter Violet a confidential relationship analogous to those which the avuncular bachelor, at fifty twice Violet's age, had established with a coterie of young girls and even
mature spinsters over the previous twenty years. Nathan much later appeared in a nostalgic book by Violet as “my dear friend”, the man who broke to her in 1915 the news of Rupert Brooke’s death and so signalled for her the end of a naïve era of her life and of English social history. Before the Edwardian bubble burst, Violet introduced Nathan into the Asquith entourage which frequented country house parties where, as she recalled “… we danced through the long summer nights till dawn [and] in the green shade of trees the art of human intercourse was exquisitely practised by men and women not yet enslaved by household cares and chores who still had time to read, to talk, to listen and to think”. At these gatherings of the great and the aspiring, Nathan cut an odd figure in the eyes of at least one observer, poised on the brink of fame as a literary iconoclast; Lytton Strachey, author of the famous collection of biographies *Eminent Victorians* which shattered posterity’s illusions about the age in which Nathan was born and to whose values he subscribed, sketched with prejorative pen the appearance of the bureaucrat “… in walrus moustaches and an almost Uncle Trevor air of imbecile and louche benignity”.^10

Bizarre though Nathan’s eminently Victorian demeanour might seem to the more modern members of his newly acquired circle, his instinctive loyalty and efficiency combined with a new-found social acceptabilty to secure him the promotion he sought. At an after-dinner conference at Downing Street just a few months after his penetration of *haut bourgeois* society, he was drawn aside by the prime minister and Samuel and offered an unexpectedly quick escape from Post Office duties. The high-ranking civil service post of chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue was soon to become vacant and Nathan was asked to fill it. Here at last was the reality of high patronage, the personal triumph of being singled out for preferment which in his dealings with Chamberlain, Elgin and Buxton he had tasted only indirectly. Though Nathan could not know it, there was a less favourable portent in the name of Sir Robert Chalmers whom he was to succeed at the Board, for distantly related members of that distinguished Scottish family appeared at several turning points in Nathan’s career, from Sir David Chalmers who wrote the damning report about Cardew in Sierra Leone, and so opened Nathan’s path into the colonial service, to Sir Mackenzie Chalmers, a prominent member of the post-rebellion Royal Commission on Ireland which attributed a share of the blame for the 1916 rising to Nathan when he was Under-Secretary, thus checking the course of his
revitalized career in the civil service and forcing him to taste the pill which Cardew had been obliged to swallow. But Nathan was no more clairvoyant than Asquith, who was urging him to accept a post in the department headed by David Lloyd George, the brilliant and ambitious Chancellor of the Exchequer who five years later became Asquith's political assassin by forcing him to resign as prime minister over the conduct of the war.

In 1911, the almost simultaneous demise of Nathan and his new mentor seemed as unlikely as the war which made both of them symbols of a passing order. From near-eclipse, Nathan's career had passed into the full light of official approbation in which he had not basked since his equally unexpected promotion to Hong Kong seven years earlier; and he accepted Asquith's offer on the spot. He knew of Lloyd George's reputation for prickly manners towards cabinet colleagues and departmental officers, though he had not at that stage met his new chief except at decorous Downing Street dinners where the Chancellor's self-consciously Welsh speech and deportment made him, rather than the Jewish Nathan, the most ill-suited guest present. But Lloyd George's controversial position in 1911 derived from his portfolio as much as from his polemical temperament. The demands of the Liberal Party's radical wing for increased land and income taxes, directed against established estates and fortunes which bore the pedigree of an aristocratic past or of nineteenth century industrialization, had been muffled during the years immediately after the party's 1906 landslide election victory but the steady growth of expenditure on defence and social services combined, after the January 1910 election, with constitutional disputes between the Lords and Commons to force an extraordinary poll at the end of that year, when Asquith was again returned but with an insufficient majority to rule without the assistance of the Irish members.

An outcome of this dependence was the 1912 Home Rule Bill for Ireland of which Nathan was later to reap the consequences. But when he moved to Inland Revenue in the previous year, he was still shielded by Lloyd George's powerful personality from the outraged Unionist objections to recent income tax provisions and he was also able to remain aloof from the widening rift in Liberal ranks between those of Lloyd George's stamp, whose relatively humble origins made them eager for further taxation of the rich, and the bourgeois members of the party who believed that the existing measures were sufficient to satisfy the Liberals' radical tradition. Nathan quickly became adept at turning the blow with his shield of public service impartiality, referring deputations of the gentry and the nouveaux
ENGLAND AND IRELAND

riches to his minister; one such delegation from the Chambers of Commerce and Manufactures included several of his old Liverpool acquaintances who had once attacked him when he was governor of the Gold Coast (and so directly responsible for the colony's revenues) because of his refusal to use indirect taxes to pay for his sanitation schemes at Cape Coast and Sekondi.22

Insofar as it is possible to judge from Lloyd George's public utterances, he seems to have regarded Nathan as a dependable assistant, referring to him in the Commons on one occasion as "the very able and distinguished Head of Inland Revenue".23 Nathan certainly considered that he was quite adequately prepared for his new duties, defending himself against a hostile question from a member of the Macdonnell Commission by pointing to his experience as a governor, when he was "in effect my own Chancellor of the Exchequer".24 Again he found time from these duties, demanding enough in themselves by the lax office-hours standards of the pre-war civil service, to serve on a number of commissions; on one of these, an enquiry into the system of army recruitment, he presided, as a mere lieutenant-colonel on the retired list, over military officers, ranking as high as general, whom he would have been obliged to salute and to mollify if he had remained a Royal Engineer, with a prospect at best of rising within his administrative echelon to the level of colonel and the post of Inspector General of Fortifications.

With this committee Nathan was engaged on a report concerning the re-employment in civilian life of retired soldiers when his exertions were rendered superfluous, even a little ludicrous, by the outbreak of a world war which was to stretch the nation's military resources to the limit. Himself an ex-soldier of fifty-two, Nathan was not called upon to don his uniform again, facing instead the greatest battle for survival of his career, clad in the sober suit of a civil servant which he had put on, as a calculated choice, fifteen years earlier. Far from the theatres of war, he nevertheless heard for the second time in his life the sound of shots fired in anger by rebels against the empire he had chosen to serve from behind a desk.

Nathan's translation from the serenity of pre-war London to the scene of his career crisis occurred almost on the brink of the declaration of war in August of 1914. On July 29 he attended a dinner at Downing Street and was drawn into conclave with Asquith and Lloyd George,25 who asked him to go to Ireland as Under-Secretary in place of Sir James Dougherty, a former clergyman and professor of philosophy, who was to retire at the age of seventy after almost twenty years in the Irish administration, the last six of them as
Under-Secretary. The peculiar system of administration which had
grown up in Ireland over the previous century, leaving executive
powers ambivalently divided between a lord-lieutenant who was
always a peer and a chief secretary who was normally a cabinet
minister, has been described by a recent authority as “... clumsy and
liable to work in an unharmonious fashion”.

As long as the chief secretary was a cabinet member, as he had been since 1902, the office
of under-secretary carried enhanced importance, since he was in a
literal sense the “man on the spot”, responsible for day-to-day ad-
ministration of a department whose jurisdiction ranged across the
full gamut from trade to the police and judiciary; more critically, the
under-secretary was entrusted with the duty of keeping his generally
absent chief fully informed of the state of the country, notably of the
activities of “disloyal” elements and the response which their
propaganda was receiving among the populace at large. Arthur
Balfour, then leading the opposition in the Commons against As-
quith’s tenuous majority, had once served as Chief Secretary in
Ireland and had then described the role of the under-secretaries as
“aiders, advisers and suggesters to their official chief... bound to fol-
low the rulings of the government which they serve and always bound
by the rulings of the civil service which are the great strength of the
administrative service”.

Though not by training a civil servant, Nathan was not exceptional
in being appointed to this responsible and difficult position; in the
previous fifty years, three other former soldiers had held it, and the
remaining seven included, in addition to Dougherty, three whose
careers had not begun in the home civil service. One of these “out-
siders”, Sir Anthony Macdonnell, under-secretary for six years
before Dougherty, had been saved from dismissal by the Unionist
government over his support for a measure of limited home rule in
Ireland only by the Liberal election victory in 1906; and later
Dougherty was on uneasy terms with Augustine Birrell, the Liberal
chief secretary from 1907 after a stormy period as Education
Minister.

Birrell was a distinguished, though not a dominant, member of the
Asquith “ministry of all the talents” whose pretensions to literary
fame matched a self-confidence which derived from backgrounds as
various as Churchill’s aristocratic roots in the family tree of the
Marlboroughs and Lloyd George’s self-conscious adherence to the
Welsh values which he inherited. An essayist and cynic, Birrell
seemed to have more in common with his political adversary Balfour
than with his prime minister; Asquith has been apotheosized by a
ENGLAND AND IRELAND

gifted pen as "essentially a prosaic character" with "a bland and weary face, in which frankness and reserve had fought themselves to a standstill", in stark contrast with Balfour's "faintly supercilious finesse ... and bitterly polite sarcasm"." Despite his entree into the Asquithian circle, Nathan had not met Birrell when he learned that he was to serve under him and he went immediately to the House of Commons to introduce himself. His first impression, that Birrell was "delightful but casual"", was to remain unaltered; as a prosaic character like his friend Asquith, Nathan never felt fully at ease with Birrell's elegant wit and never completely approved of his chief's cavalier attitude to his work. There was some contemporary speculation that Nathan's reputation as a proficient bureaucrat and "strong man" accounted for his appointment as a foil (or, as one newspaper suggested, as a buttress) for Birrell's physical absence from, and alleged absent-mindedness about, Ireland." Birrell's tolerance towards the Irish and their Roman Catholic faith, though himself the son of a Baptist minister, extended also to Jews, for whom he confessed to having "a soft corner in his heart", and he was therefore neither surprised nor displeased at the appointment of a professing Jew as his right hand man, though the Irish press considered the choice a little bizarre and one newspaper wondered aloud why Nathan had accepted a post "... comparatively humble in the official hierarchy and certainly less distinguished and less liberally endowed than others he has already held"." At £2,000 a year the Irish under-secretary's salary was not princely, no more than he had been paid as chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, but the under-secretary also had, as a perquisite of office, the use of an official residence in Dublin and a field of activity more wide-ranging than the narrowly compartmentalized home civil service had offered. Above all, Nathan had been asked by the prime minister to take the position and the cachet which such a request carried would alone account for his acceptance, without the added honour of adding to his collection of titles the coveted letters "P.C.", denoting membership of the elite Privy Council; that he was a member only of the lesser Irish Council did not rob the distinction of the aura which the letters carried and which his former South African colleague Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson had sought in vain after he was denied the Governor-Generalship of the Union four years before.

Armed with this new distinction, Nathan set about the acquisition of some knowledge about Ireland, of which he knew as little as Birrell had when he first became chief secretary in 1907. Following the
civil servant's priorities learned in his constant inter-departmental shifts over the four previous years, Nathan first attempted to acquaint himself with the personality and prejudices of his new chief, a process he was obliged to repeat on a less intensive level within a year, when a new lord-lieutenant came to Dublin. Towards Birrell Nathan demonstrated an attitude of ingenuous awe, only part of it deliberately flattering and the rest a product of the man of action's self-effacement before the man of letters. In an early letter, he told Birrell that his correspondence was being "stored up [as] a not unimportant bit of the emolument of my office". Like his more polished essays, Birrell's letters were masterly in their display of a cool and uncluttered style of prose practised by Edwardian writers reacting against the profuse manner of their literary predecessors, but the quality in them which appealed to Nathan, never an habitue of the circle Birrell moved in, was the astringent criticism they contained of political acquaintances, friends and foes alike. This cabinet room and club gossip was a revelation and a delight to one of Nathan's social background and aspirations but his pleasure did not obscure from Birrell a sense that his new assistant also disapproved of his frivolity about matters of high policy. When his wife's illness and subsequent death left Birrell grief-stricken and toying with resignation, Nathan's repeated enquiries about his intentions brought from Birrell a scorching rebuke for "your evident and acute anticipation" of the event.

After this early joust, Nathan rarely attempted to override Birrell on any subject but the chief secretary, even after he had decided to withhold his resignation, evidently remained suspicious of Nathan's ambitions, remarking at the end of 1915 that it was "...because you are known to be so masterful, and I so weak, that nobody can believe I ever do anything on my own account". To some extent this suspicion may have been planted in Birrell's mind when the Manchester Guardian contrasted his "vacillation and lack of guidance" with what it considered was Nathan's record of firmness as a colonial governor. Much was made in this and other editorials, at the time of Nathan's appointment to Ireland, of his experience in Natal of preparing the ground for a constitutional change analogous with that which would follow in Ireland when the Home Rule Act, suspended for the duration of the war, came into effect. Birrell therefore might be excused if he wondered whether Nathan might be tempted to believe his publicity and strike a pose as a policy-maker in his functionary's seat at Dublin Castle.

It will emerge in the treatment of their actions as master and ser-
vant over the two years of their relationship that, beyond an early and quickly abandoned attempt to push Birrell towards a policy of coercion towards extremist newspapers, Nathan made no effort to override his chief's convictions about the necessity to appease Ireland during the war. Birrell was his superior officer, however little he resembled those he had obeyed in the army and the colonial service, and his will was absolute, even when it seemed timid or irrational.

The intensity of Nathan's faith in this hierarchical set of values is demonstrable by comparing his acquiescence towards Birrell, his real master, and his assertive behaviour towards Wimborne, lord-lieutenant from August 1915 when the elderly Lord Aberdeen and his busybody wife departed unlamented. Mrs Margot Asquith had forewarned Nathan that the young sprig of the Churchill family had "no tact or manners" and Birrell reinforced this impression by calling him "a crude young man [who] does not exhibit any fine shades of character". Even without this evidence that his London allies did not expect him to be compliant towards Wimborne, Nathan's finely tuned sense of the hierarchy of power prepared him to be punctilious in his treatment of the lord-lieutenant's insistence that his post was more than ceremonial. In a letter in which he assured the Under-Secretary that he had no intention of interfering in "matters of administration", Wimborne asserted that nevertheless he shared responsibility for the security of the country and demanded that the monthly intelligence reports be sent to him. After consulting Birrell, Nathan bowed to this demand, but only after an exchange of letters in which he took a stand on precedent and protocol which permanently alienated Wimborne. By 1916, when their relations had cooled to such a degree that they no longer communicated with each other except on official business, a note of triumph crept into Wimborne's letter of commiseration after Nathan resigned, as he expressed his pleasure that "... no differences we may have entertained on questions of policy have found a way into our personal relations".

In fact, their differences, both in background and conviction, were so great that Wimborne complained before the post-rebellion Royal Commission that Nathan had held inflexibly to "the doctrine of the lord-lieutenant's complete irresponsibility".

In view of the esteem in which Nathan was held by many of his contemporaries, ranging from Colonial Office clerks to the prime minister, it is ironical that no period of his long career has received such attention as that which permanently cast a shadow over his reputation as an administrator, the nineteen months of his term as
under-secretary of Ireland. The closest analogies to his Irish experiences were those in the Gold Coast and Natal, in both of which colonies he nevertheless faced only the threat of rebellion, though he had betrayed in those years such apprehension about the damage a rebellion might do to his career prospects that he could have been expected to react rapidly to the rumours of trouble which reached him almost from the day of his arrival in Ireland. In mitigation, it must be admitted that in Ireland he was doubly handicapped, first by a historical complexity which was beyond the powers of insight possessed by men of more subtle character than his own and, more practically, by a supposedly professional intelligence service several degrees more incompetent than those rudimentary rumormongering machines which in Africa had persuaded him not only to react but to overreact to the prospect of rebellion. In Ireland Nathan was trapped in a crossfire between local and imperial aspirations far more intense than that in Natal between embryonic colonial nationalism and the Liberals' paternalistic pose as the guardians of "native welfare". In Natal the sharpshooting was from two directions; in Ireland it came from all sides, Unionist and Liberal, loyalist and revolutionary, military and civilian, the aggressive Wimborne and the increasingly defensive Birrell. As a soldier Nathan had never had to duck shots aimed straight at him and in the home civil service his predilection for taking cover behind his minister's skirts had become a habit. When The Times praised Nathan after his first months in office for practising the adage, "lie low and do nothing", it did not guess that he would eventually convert this virtue into a programme of rule for Ireland.

Ironically it was almost precisely at the moment when The Times was complimenting Nathan for his masterly inactivity that he was behaving most assertively in his dealings with Birrell. Inasmuch as it is possible to characterize Birrell's wartime policy in a phrase, it was of the status quo variety which might have been expected to appeal to Nathan, a practitioner of similar policies in the Crown colonies he had governed. The exigencies of war account largely for Birrell's attempts to appease Irish opinion until the Home Rule Act could be taken out of cotton wool but his sceptical view of mankind was redoubled in his conception of Irish loyalty: "nobody in Ireland, North or South ... was, or ever has been, loyal to England in the true sense of the word", he wrote in his memoirs. Of the factions in the country, it was the Nationalists led in the House of Commons by John Redmond in whom he had the greatest confidence, or the least distrust, and he agreed with them that a policy of coercion towards
ENGLAND AND IRELAND

the extremists, who did not share Redmond’s pragmatic belief in cooperating with the Irish government for the duration of the war, would be likely to incite the public to follow their lead.

Early in Nathan’s term, the issue came to a head over the publication of seditious statements in clandestine newspapers ranging in the intensity of their hatred of the British from the merely abusive tone of the so-called Sinn Fein press to the frankly revolutionary incitements contained in *The Irish Worker* edited by Jim Larkin. Under the influence of General L.B. Friend, the commander of the British army in Ireland, Nathan recommended late in 1914 that the most blatantly anti-government newspapers should be suppressed. To some extent Nathan’s agreement with the army view stemmed from his dependence on the military intelligence service as a supplement to the inadequate information he was receiving from the civil police, notably the Royal Irish Constabulary responsible for the provincial area outside Dublin and commanded by Sir Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain’s Unionist connections and Friend’s importunities did not endear either man to Birrell; he told Nathan that in his opinion “N.C.’s judgement is nil” and that he had “a complete lack of confidence in General Friend’s or Neville Chamberlain’s capacity to avoid tumbling into every ditch, dry or wet, that lies in their way”. Nor did the experience of finding his new assistant throwing the advice of such men in his face make Birrell any more inclined to heed Nathan’s plea for permission to crack down on the seditious newspapers. He would have been even less pleased if he had known that simultaneously Nathan was informing John Dillon, Redmond’s lieutenant in the Irish parliamentary party, that, while he shared Birrell’s “strong dislike for coercive measures”, he thought that an exception should certainly be made for the extremist newspapers, whose overt sedition could not be tolerated at a time when British arms were suffering serious setbacks in France and the Irish administration was under pressure to recruit replacements on behalf of the War Office.

Birrell acquiesced reluctantly in a compromise, devised by Nathan in consultation with Friend late in 1914, whereby warnings were issued to seven newspapers; three subsequently stopped publication and the editors of two others responded to the warning to moderate their tone. Two papers, *Ireland* and the *Irish Worker*, failed to heed the official cautions and their presses were seized, but in December there appeared a new publication called *Scissors and Paste* and suspected to be the successor of *Ireland*. General Friend was anxious not to allow such a rapid resurgence of suppressed papers to pass un-
punished and at his request Nathan approached Lord Kitchener, Secretary of War, to secure his sanction for a military raid on the new press. Kitchener undertook to issue the order if Birrell’s approval could be gained and Nathan continued to harp on the subject in his private letters to his chief. In the end Birrell agreed that the paper could be made a scapegoat if it had “no friends” in the Irish parliamentary party, though he added: “I don’t think Scissors and Paste worth powder and shot”.

Nathan’s argument was that any failure to nip in the bud such defiance of official warnings would reduce to impotence Birrell’s own reliance on the issuing of a caution as a prelude to seizure of a press and, at this stage at least, his opinion carried the day. After a delay when the War Office had some second thoughts about using military forces in this way to assist the civil authorities, Scissors and Paste (and, the authorities then believed, three other papers printed on the same press) was suppressed in March, 1915.

After this appearance in the role of strong man, Nathan receded into an interpretation of his function which conformed precisely with that later formulated by the Royal Commission on the 1916 rebellion: “His duty is to report fully and fairly to his Chief all information that he can obtain, to give his advice freely as to what should be done, and then loyally to carry out the instructions of his Chief without regard to any personal opinion of his own”. This narrow definition of the under-secretary’s powers derived not only from Nathan’s bureaucratic mentality but from his growing conviction that Birrell’s conciliatory policy was the safest available; within six months of his arrival in Dublin Castle he had become a complete convert to the Chief Secretary’s point of view. Nowhere is this change of heart more evident than in his opinions on the wisdom of continuing to stamp out outspokenly anti-British newspapers. In March 1915, Nathan had been the only executive officer wholeheartedly in favour of seizing the Scissors and Paste press; a year later his was the only dissenting voice at a conference of civil and military officers which voted in favour of further suppression when The Gael and Spark continued to appear despite the elimination of the press they had been thought to share with Scissors and Paste.

In the first flush of his enthusiasm for stopping seditious newspapers Nathan had disagreed with Birrell’s belief that Spark would “light no fire” but he had come to think that its suppression, and that of The Gael, would produce only a temporary effect on the other “violent” papers and would certainly lead to “misrepresentation” of the government’s policy in Irish-American circles at a
time when funds from the United States contributed to the revolutionary element in Ireland were increasing in volume. But, at the end of a detailed statement of the arguments against seizure of *The Gael* press, Nathan suggested that Birrell should “... let the War Office do as it thinks fit”.  

The confusion of mind which this strange conclusion revealed was the consequence of Nathan’s attempt to acquire a reputation as an impartial audience for advice from conflicting quarters. Birrell had failed to instruct him positively in the attitude he should adopt towards the partisan interests who would certainly attempt to influence his judgement, beyond a vague exhortation to cultivate the confidence of the Redmondite faction and a much more precise direction that he should not heed the cries of the Unionist opposition for a “crack down” policy in Ireland. Through Walter Long, an old family friend and a member of the coalition cabinet, Nathan was in touch with the current of Unionist opinion in England, though he refrained from close association with the Dublin equivalent, centred on the Kildare Street Club, or the Ulster loyalists headed by Sir Edward Carson. Near the end of his term in Natal, Nathan had confided to Long his fears about the dissolution of the Empire as local nationalisms grew in strength behind the grant of “home rule”. Consequently, Long and the Unionist peer Lord Midleton felt that in Nathan they had a strategically placed supporter of their opinions on the need for a tough policy in Ireland; Midleton later told the Royal Commission that he had taken away from his discussions with Nathan the clear impression that Birrell was holding back the under-secretary, against his better judgement. A lifelong Liberal voter who had once referred to Lord Salisbury’s Unionist administration as “the worst government in modern times”, Nathan obviously valued the bi-partisan image he had acquired during his home civil service years, as he hinted when he asked Birrell: “Should not the Unionists be satisfied by my being on your staff?” But Birrell was a fierce partisan and would have nothing to do with any wartime suspension of political hostilities, even under a coalition government, where Ireland was concerned; he roundly dismissed Nathan’s tentative compliments for the restraint of such Irish Unionists as Sir Horace Plunkett and administered a scorching rebuke when Nathan praised his former South African colleague and Unionist leader Lord Selborne, whom Birrell portrayed as “that poor result of intercourse between a half-worn-out Chancery barrister and a middle-aged lady of Quality”.  

After these reminders of the need to step warily around Birrell’s
political susceptibilities, Nathan was less eager to pose as a liaison officer between the parties and grew more receptive to the Liberal views which were urged on him by his former patron Charles Hobhouse. As Postmaster-General during the early part of Nathan’s term in Ireland, Hobhouse had rejected the under-secretary’s requests for the dismissal of Irish post office employees suspected of revolutionary sympathies and thereafter he kept up a steady barrage of exhortation whenever Nathan seemed to waver under military and Unionist pressure for coercion. But the main influence on Nathan during his transition from advocacy of suppression to unqualified support of conciliation was John Dillon.

The position Dillon occupied in the Irish parliamentary party was roughly analogous with Nathan’s in the Irish government; both were the men on the spot, feeding information and advice to superiors who were largely confined by parliamentary duties to London. Just as Nathan’s opinions did not always coincide with his chief’s, at least in his early months in Ireland, so Dillon did not automatically agree with Redmond’s assessment of Irish public opinion. Nathan witnessed this conflict at first hand in Dublin near the beginning of his consultations with the Nationalist leaders, when he met Redmond, Dillon and Joseph Devlin, the third member of the party’s triumvirate. Redmond advised Nathan to crack down on the “Sinn Fein” newspapers, which had been attacking Redmond’s support of the British war effort and exhorting Irishmen to join MacNeill’s rival Irish Volunteers, since September 1914 a separate entity from the Redmondite National Volunteers. But Dillon repeated at the meeting the sentiments he had already expressed in a letter to Nathan: “... so far from helping us ... the suppression of these wretched, scurrilous rags will only increase the difficulties [and] ... may have a very evil influence on the whole situation”. Nathan replied that he also felt “a strong dislike” of coercive measures but that he was convinced of the need to make an example of the more blatant newspapers. Dillon was as unimpressed with this argument as he was with Nathan’s efforts to secure the release by the military authorities of arms and ammunition wanted by Redmond’s National Volunteers; in this attempt to curry the favour of the Redmondites Nathan was torn between the intransigence of the army and his own fears that the National Volunteers were not totally to be relied upon once they were armed.

There developed the curious situation of Redmond, in London, pressing Birrell to suppress the inflammatory newspapers while, in Dublin, Dillon tried to dampen Nathan’s ardour for such action. After the seizure of Scissors and Paste, Dillon redoubled his efforts
and, closely coinciding with Birrell’s views, his advice was instrumental in bringing Nathan around to a less interventionist line; no press seizures occurred for a year after March 1915, though the intelligence report at the end of that year listed nine publications regarded by the police as “seditious”. Dillons’s counsels of moderation had triumphed over those of the army and the police. While by March of 1916 Nathan thought he saw the growth in Dillon of “the ‘coercionist’ ... as well as the ‘Imperialist’”, he was quickly disabused of the idea that Dillon approved of the suppression of The Gael in that month; Dillon upbraided him for this reversion to a policy of interfering with the extremist newspapers and warned him that it would once again stir public opinion against the Nationalists as well as against the government. Nathan’s uncertainty by this stage about the direction of Dillon’s thinking, combined with a suspicion he had formed earlier in the year about his informant’s “honesty of purpose, or perhaps I should say honesty of method”, largely explains Nathan’s muddled advice to Birrell, in which he rehearsed the arguments against seizure of The Gael but advised his chief to let the army have its way.

In Dillon, as with Moor in Natal, Nathan had grown to depend on the local knowledge of a politician whom he could not quite bring himself to trust. Neither was a “gentleman”, acting within the mores which Nathan accepted as an ideal, but each was indispensable to him. That the Nationalists recognized their influence over Nathan is plain from a paraphrase by Dillon’s biographer of his and Redmond’s private reaction in 1915, when Birrell’s visits to Ireland became less frequent during his period of mourning following his wife’s death: “This, in fact, suited the Irish leaders well enough. In Dublin Dillon had begun to develop an amicable relationship with Nathan, who called from time to time at [Dillon’s house in] North Great George’s Street (it was still against Dillon’s principles to visit the Under-Secretary’s Office) ....” Such a compliant under-secretary was invaluable to Dillon and he later expressed his regret when Nathan left Ireland after the rebellion: “Nathan told me that he had resigned and would sail for England tomorrow night. So we shall be left entirely in the hands of the military”.

Nathan’s modus vivendi with Dillon brought him so close to Birrell’s assessment of the Irish situation that it effectually removed any threat of an open clash between them, such as that which loomed over the suppression of newspapers late in 1914 and early in 1915. As in Natal, Nathan’s early enthusiasm for the cause of placating “home” opinion faded before a growing accommodation with local
attitudes and a conviction that, whatever the aspirations of stay-at-home Englishmen might be to continue in the role of imperial suzerains, the future of the country he was administering would be worked out on the spot. His own contribution, as in South Africa, would be most effective if it was directed towards supporting those leaders of local opinion whom he could regard as moderate in their formulation of constitutional demands. Thus, although his conferences with Redmond and the other Nationalist leaders were a natural outgrowth of the Liberals' declared policy of granting home rule for Ireland, he took several modest initiatives which went beyond the call of duty to his political masters in London.

Nathan vigorously pressed Lloyd George not to interfere with the free sale of Irish lands or alcohol during the war, for fear that such intervention would confirm local fears that the Liberals were preparing to abandon home rule plans under pressure from the Ulster Unionists, and he became a fervent opponent of the War Office's proposals to implement military conscription in Ireland. Dillon had long urged him to "...represent strongly that any attempt to enforce conscription in Ireland will have most serious and deplorable effects" but Nathan hesitated for months, fearful of exceeding his brief as a civil servant, before eventually going to see Asquith in London to state "most emphatically" his belief that, while Irishmen might be recruited, it would be foolhardy to press them into service. As in the case of the Ashanti in the Gold Coast, the disaffected elements in the population must be given no "cry" against the government, an attitude which Nathan expressed and defended before the Royal Commission when he said that conscription, like any effort to disarm the Irish Volunteers, would have "completely alienated" nationalist opinion "...and, with it, that large body of Irish feeling which had been favourable to Great Britain in this war". As 1916 dawned, and conscription seemed certain to be avoided in Ireland, he confidently reported to Birrell that he did not observe "...the acceleration of a triumphant movement and no conscription will mean its retardation". If readily available alcohol and freedom from compulsory military service in Ireland can be equated as local symbols with the Ashanti Golden Stool, this pronouncement is a demonstration of how little fifteen years and a variety of experiences had altered Nathan's faith in a policy of restraint as a means of preserving the peace, if not the loyalty, of subject populations.

If Nathan had been able to produce before the Royal Commission solid evidence of his having advised Birrell that restraint was not a
cure-all for Irish hostility to Britain, and if he had been able to document an early warning to his chief of an imminent rising, he might have saved his reputation as Cardew had salvaged his after the Sierra Leone rebellion. In fact, all Nathan could show the Commission in exoneration of his failure was the fact that, even in such limited action as he had taken in 1915 against newspapers and individuals, he had acted “... against the advice of members of the Irish Parliamentary Party ... on whose knowledge of the people it was considered reliance could generally be placed”.

As late as February 1916, he had declared in an interview with Lord Midleton that he was “... averse to any action likely to lead on to general measures of coercion” against the extremists of the “Sinn Fein” movement but, in a move which was obviously politically motivated, the Unionist witnesses before the Commission consistently attempted to portray Nathan as held in check by Birrell, on whom (with the Liberal Party in general) they wished to lay the sole blame for the rebellion.

An examination of Nathan’s reports to Birrell in the early months of 1916 affirm the Royal Commission’s conclusion—though not, as will be shown later, its entire argument—that the under-secretary must share the official responsibility for failing to foresee the Easter rising. In fact, Nathan had been far less apprehensive about the rumours of a rebellion which reached him in April of 1916 than he had been about reports shortly before Christmas in 1914 that Germany was to support a landing of the “Irish Regiment”, recruited by Sir Roger Casement from prisoner-of-war camps. Still new enough to Ireland to be sceptical of Dillon’s assurances that these rumours were a case of the revolutionaries’ whistling in the dark, Nathan cancelled his plans to go to London on leave and, as in Hong Kong during the Russo-Japanese war, waited at his post for an attack which never came.

By 1916 the role of sceptic was reversed; Dillon wrote to Redmond on Easter Sunday that he feared the worst (though he did not confide his fears to Nathan until too late), while informants’ reports reaching Nathan through the intelligence services left him “feeling a little bit worried” at the end of March but seeing “no indications of a ‘rising’” as late as Easter Saturday. The informers’ reports—the first useful information from inside the Irish Volunteers which had reached him—were nevertheless passed on to London by Nathan without any comment which might crystallize for Birrell their piecemeal hints of brewing trouble. Wimborne’s intuition, or his desire to flex his constitutional muscles, made him more receptive to the auguries of an impending rebellion. When the informer “Granite” telephoned...
Dublin Castle on 15 March with a vague report of “trouble” on the night of the twenty-fourth, Wimborne obviously wanted to take action. He had complained to Nathan a week earlier of having to learn from the newspapers of such major events as this seizure of a consignment of smuggled arms at Cork and he had at last extracted from the under-secretary and undertaking to send him daily, instead of monthly, intelligence reports. Seeing “Granite’s” report while it was still fresh, Wimborne proposed the immediate disarming of the Irish Volunteers, the deportation of their known recruiting agents and, with a characteristic leap from the preventive to the provocative, the imposition of conscription. In every detail, this proposal conflicted with Nathan’s fully matured belief in the need to avoid coercion but he gave way to the lord-lieutenant on the question of deportations and also approved the seizure of small caches of Volunteer arms in order to buy time for the defence of his main objective, the continued postponement of conscription. Within a week he reported to Birrell that the deportations “... certainly did good in the country” but he remained intransigent in his opposition to conscription, echoing his memories of the fate of Hodgson in the Gold Coast and McCallum in Natal when he said that he would be “... disappointed if while attempts are being made to raise troops in Ireland, English troops are demobilized to keep Ireland in order”. He knew only too well, though in the event he could not evade a repetition of his predecessors’ experiences in Africa, what could happen to officials unable to preserve order in their bailiwicks.

Thus on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, Nathan fell at last between the two stools of “action and inaction”, those perilously poised foundations which Birrell described as the bases of his policy in Ireland and which Nathan had come to adopt as his own, having rested on them throughout his decade as a colonial governor. The “action” in Birrell’s programme during Nathan’s term was in the nature of sporadic and, on the chief secretary’s part, reluctant crackdowns on the “crack-brained people” who were thought to lead the revolutionary movement; he would not go further and disarm the Irish Volunteers, a move which he dismissed as late as February, 1916 as “reckless and foolish”. Nathan’s report in his letter to Birrell on 14 April, carefully balancing the benefits of deportations and arms seizures against the wisdom of restraint on the “big issue” of conscription, reassured the chief secretary that all was well in Ireland, especially in view of Nathan’s confident conclusion that the majority of the population was either loyal or passive, and that those who
ENGLAND AND IRELAND

were neither lacked the arms to make a rebellion formidable. 80
Distracted by the prospect of a cabinet reshuffle in which his head might roll because of his opposition to conscription in Ireland, Birrell was content with Nathan’s assurances and brightened his personal gloom by reading a book about “the Chevalier de Boufflers and his enchanting lady-mistress”. 81

Coincidentally, the confirmed bachelor Nathan had been indulging in a somewhat similar diversion from the cares of office. He had a reputation, which he prized, for such single-minded devotion to his desk that one of his obituarists concluded that Nathan had never married because “... he had no time”. 82 Certainly no misogynist, he valued the friendship of a wide variety of women, from the obscure and slightly obsequious girls who sought his advice to prominent and self-sufficient ladies, ranging in age from the young Violet Asquith to Mary Cholmondeley, a mature spinster and indeed his senior in years and achievement in the public eye when he met her. The direction in which advice and confidences passed between him and these women friends was nevertheless one-way, as was apparent in his rejection of Mary Kingsley’s attempts to influence him in his official duties in Sierra Leone. Later, in Queensland, he publicly affirmed his anti-feminist opinions at a time when women’s social and political equality had been accepted in principle, and to a considerable extent in practice, in Britain and in the colonies. For Nathan, a woman’s place was in the home, but not in his home. At the same time, he was not entirely immune against the blandishments of a clever and ambitious woman who sought to manipulate his interest in her for her own ends.

By 1916, Nathan’s mother had been dead for seven years and the prying eyes of expatriate populations were no longer on him, as they had been in the microcosmic white communities of India, Africa and Hong Kong. This freedom from the calls of familial duty and public decorum may account for Nathan’s susceptibility when, in the course of his semi-official activities as under-secretary, he met the young wife of a mining manager who had joined the British army. Constance Heppell-Marr, later to become famous after a second marriage as Constance Spry and a popular writer on cookery and floral decoration, was working with the Irish Red Cross and she approached Nathan for permission to establish a hospital at Dublin Castle. On the strength of this acquaintance, she asked for his intercession on behalf of her husband, who wanted to transfer to Nathan’s old corps, the Royal Engineers. Nathan wrote to his War Office friends, requesting special treatment for Captain Marr, and
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

apparently sought as a *quid pro quo* the company of Mrs Marr at a dinner celebrating his birthday in January, 1916. This was the first of a series of dinners, both at his lodge and at the “top back” flat in St. Stephen’s Green where she lived while her two children were in the country. Most of these meetings were *a deux* but at least at one of them Captain Marr was present.⁸³

Nathan’s letters to Mrs Marr have not survived, for he preserved no copies of them, as he did of his aloof notes to Mary Kingsley, but Mrs Marr wrote copiously and with a growing air of self-revelation to him over the ensuing two years of their relationship.⁸⁴ Even after full allowance is made for her admissions of “egotism” and of “black loneliness”, deprived of her husband’s and her children’s company for the duration of the war, it is clear that, on her side, there developed an affection for Nathan which, while calculating and self-interested, represented itself in a manner more intense and less platonic than that of the numerous *ingenues* who confided in him. As long as he remained in Ireland, Nathan’s demeanour towards her was apparently correct and uncompromising, and she sent him a series of allusive verses and stories depicting her new friend as a “kindly angel with a hidden face” and herself as struggling to maintain her self-restraint in his company; the verses are spiced with references to her cheeks growing hot with shame, “… for I defy my womanhood”, and with confessions that her lips have been “… crying your name incessantly”. As if these were not sufficiently frank admissions of her attraction towards him, and his signs of responding (“he fiercely longs, yet scarcely dares to hear those siren sounds”), she penned another and appropriately floral metaphor in a verse called “Two Minds: His: Hers:”

A wanderer without
May yet catch perchance a fragrant breath of flowers …
If you some day those branches part
And entering the radiance, know that you
May share it too.

Nathan seems to have resisted this invitation while he was in Ireland; there is no evidence for a charge against him of dallying while Dublin burned, for he did not see Mrs Marr between 10 April and Easter—though the presence at his lodge of his sister-in-law and her children may account for this temporary break in a relationship which, however discreet it had remained, did not conform with the reputation for ascetic bachelorhood he had acquired during his fifty-four years of dedication to his mother, his studies and his career. But
after his departure from Ireland under a cloud, which seemed certain
to darken forever his prospects of resuming that career, he continued
to meet Mrs Marr in London, more frequently after she had per­
suaded him to give her a testimonial with which she secured a welfare
job in England. If Mrs Marr’s somewhat hysterical testimony can be
accepted, their relationship finally lost its enforced platonic
character even before she finally farewelled her husband, with whom
she was on less than warm terms, for the front; after one of her
meetings with Nathan, in September of 1916, at her “temperance,
presbyterian hotel in London”, she wrote to him triumphantly of
“the abandonment of a saint”. There is good reason to assume that
this “abandonment” was largely a product of her vivid and, at the
time, disordered imagination, since Nathan had undergone a minor
but uncomfortable operation two months earlier and her letters, both
before and after his supposed surrender, were full of commiseration
for his discomfort and his fears of growing old now that he had lost
his life’s purpose, the pursuit of responsible office.

Thereafter the friendship cooled, Mrs Marr expressing a year later
the vain hope that Nathan had destroyed her “idiotic screeds”; although the tone remained affectionate and strayed occasionally
into references to her “loving admiration” for him, she wrote at in­
creasing length about her young son, who was staying with his grand­
parents, and of her two brothers, killed in action. Nathan began to
seek diversion elsewhere, briefly cultivating the acquaintance of “a
beautiful Mrs Hutchinson” whom he met at a London dinner party, 85
and when Mrs Marr left England for a holiday in 1918 she mentioned
vague plans to meet Nathan again. She apparently never did so, pos­
sibly because of her husband’s imminent return from the war front.

Distracting though this encounter with Mrs Marr in Dublin might
have been, the Easter rebellion found Nathan en famille, or as near
that condition as a bachelor could be. Estelle, the wife of his
publisher brother George who was then serving with the Royal Navy
Volunteer Reserve, joined Nathan at the Under-Secretary’s lodge
after a crossing of the Irish channel made anxious by the danger of
attacks by German submarines. 86 The presence of his sister-in-law
and her children underlines Nathan’s confidence in the safety of
Ireland, and when this ignorance was momentarily lessened by news
that a boat carrying German arms and a passenger believed to be the
renegade Irishman Sir Roger Casement had been sighted off the
Tralee coast he told Birrell that he was still “fairly cheerful . . . not
knowing much of what is going on”. At first he had been “inclined”
to relent before the pressure of the army, and of Wimborne, to authorize raids on known caches of Volunteer arms in Dublin as well as the provinces but he was resisting the temptation until it became clearer whether the Volunteers were in league with the Germans who had scuttled their ship off Kerry. At this point, Nathan was still preoccupied with the niceties of preparation for home rule, worrying over the appointment of a Protestant law officer and the membership of the Board of National Education, and into these side-issues he was being harried by Dillon, who warned that, in appointing churchmen to vacancies on these bodies, the "... Castle was leaving to the future Nationalist Government too much clerical rule in the country." But, with Dillon not passing on his trepidation about the implications of the Germans' attempted landing, Nathan still believed that there was "... no indication of a 'rising'".

From this point on Easter Saturday, with the receipt of a confirmed report that MacNeill's Irish Volunteers planned a public parade on the Sunday, Nathan and Wimborne represented opposite poles in their assessment, as the men on the spot in possession of such information as the intelligence services could collect, of the threat of insurrection. The lord lieutenant considered that the appearance of the German ship constituted sufficient proof of Volunteer collusion with the enemy, the necessary evidence of treason to bring into effect the Defence of the Realm Act, amended in March of 1915 to require overt military acts by Irish residents before the executive could call upon summary powers to forestall rebellion. Despite his later submission to the Royal Commission, in which he portrayed his own role after Easter Saturday as that of a voice crying in a wilderness of official inactivity, Wimborne in fact agreed with Nathan on Easter Saturday that detection of Casement's landing had nipped rebellion in the bud; the crucial point on which he differed with the undersecretary on that and the next day was the attitude which each wished to see taken towards the Irish Volunteer leaders. Wimborne remained adamant, even after the publication in a Sunday newspaper of an order by MacNeill countermanding the Volunteer mobilization, that the known Volunteer leaders should be summarily interned under the Defence of the Realm Act and the action reported later to London. Nathan took a stand on propriety, insisting that authority first be secured from the law officers, the military command and the Home Office, whose assent was required to the assumption of emergency powers by the Irish government. It is difficult to avoid a comparison between Nathan's punctiliousness in this matter and his behaviour in an analogous situation in Natal;
there the reluctance with which he had proclaimed martial law in
Zululand in 1907 was followed by official disquiet in London at his
acquiescence and a serious setback to his efforts to acquire influence
with his local ministers because of his insistence on registering a
protest against their advice.

Reinforced by his more recent knowledge of home civil service
protocol and of Birrell’s determination, at least as strong as Elgin’s
in 1907, not to overreact to mere rumours of trouble with “the
natives”, Nathan’s insistence on having behind him the full weight of
official approval for acts of summary internment rested as much on
the legacy he carried with him to Ireland as on the explanation he of­
ered to the Royal Commission that “the declaration of policy of the
Irish Volunteers was not in itself ... such as to justify their suppres­
sion”. The “other difficulties in the way” once the German interven­
tion “… furnished such justification” included not only the danger of
alienating public opinion, which Nathan specified in his submission
to the Royal Commission, but the threat to his own career which he
did not mention.

A recent account of developments in the ranks of the rebellion’s
planners suggests that the delay in arresting the known leaders was
decisive not only in allowing the insurrection to take place but in giv­
ing it the air of sacrificial protest which the extremists wanted to
create in order to whip up the passive elements in public opinion
against Britain.99 Another source contends that “Nathan, and those
whose business it was to keep him fully informed, had, it is now
abundantly clear, seriously miscalculated the position .... the prin­
cipal charge against the Castle authorities remains—that they were
remarkably ignorant of where power lay in the revolutionary move­
ment and what the younger, fanatical leaders intended”.90

Notwithstanding the fact that even Eoin MacNeill, the Irish
Volunteers’ leader, was also unconscious of the extent to which the
Irish Republican Brotherhood zealots had seized the initiative from
his more moderate coterie, the charge against the government’s intel­
ligence services, and against Nathan as the official ultimately respon­
sible for their failure, is irrefutable even without the important
Dublin Metropolitan Police reports. Nathan told the Royal Com­
mission with every appearance of honesty that, as late as the morning
of the rising, he had received no D.M.P. reports implicating P.H.
Pearse and his Irish Republican brethren in anything but the officially
tolerated activities of MacNeill’s Volunteer movement; thus his
analysis of the rising, attributing the leadership of the insurrection to
that “small knot of violent men [who] ... worked with great
secrecy”, was an *ex post facto* conclusion based on evidence which came to the notice of the Irish government only after the arrest of Pearse and his fellow-revolutionaries. Nathan knew more of James Connolly and his small Citizen Army of dedicated trade unionists, ostensibly created to protect workers against the police, but, until the D.M.P. reports become available, it will remain a matter of puzzlement why the intelligence services, capable at least by 1916 of infiltrating the Irish Volunteer ranks, were unable to exploit what are now known to have been the increasingly heated divisions by the end of 1915 between Connolly, who wanted immediate insurrection, and the I.R.B., which wanted to wait for German aid. This apparent insensitivity equalled that of Donald Stewart in Ashanti, who never believed “his people” would rise again, and Sir Charles Saunders in Zululand, who in 1907 saw a new rebellion led by Dinizulu behind every bush.

While praising the police for their general work and quoting their reports “…to show that even before the outbreak of war and during the war, full knowledge of the existing state of affairs was supplied to the Under-Secretary”, the Royal Commission concluded that their Crimes Special Branches were not “…specially qualified to deal with political crime”. Although as the head in practice of the civil government Nathan bore the responsibility for this inadequacy, the crucial failing was the selection for such a demanding task (the Commission considered it “anomalous in quiet times, and almost unworkable in times of crisis”) of an official whose personal record in dealing with political problems in his bailiwicks showed clear indications of vacillation between draconian suppression of the Chinese press in Hong Kong and only reluctant support in Natal of similar measures against Dinizulu.

The Royal Commission praised the “utmost loyalty” with which Nathan had followed Birrell’s policy in Ireland but attributed to him a share of the blame for the rising on the grounds that “…he did not sufficiently impress upon the Chief Secretary … the necessity for more active measures to remedy the situation in Ireland which on December 18th [1915] in a letter to the Chief Secretary he described as ‘most serious and menacing’”. For a Commission whose members could lay claim to considerable legal experience, this quotation out of context was a surprising lapse from fair standards of logic and chronological precision. Not only had Nathan informed Birrell only two weeks later that he did not “…observe the acceleration of a triumphant movement” but also that “…no conscription would mean its retardation”. On the Commission’s own showing,
Nathan’s alarm at the end of 1915 was confined to his fear, subsequently removed when the War Office held its hand, about the consequences “...which undoubtedly will follow any attempt to enforce conscription, or even if there is no such attempt might take place as a result of continual unsucccess of the British Arms [in the European war].”

Nathan may be reasonably condemned for his official ignorance but not for his failure to warn Birrell that a rebellion would occur. In April 1916, he had been convinced that the Irish Volunteers’ leaders did not want it and had too few arms to attempt it, and even on Easter Sunday he had been content to await the exchange of telegrams with London, though he knew that they would be delayed during the holiday period, before rounding up the hundred leaders Wimborne wanted to arrest. By the time Birrell set out on his rounds of the various London offices to secure the necessary warrants, the rising had begun and Nathan’s official fate was sealed.

The under-secretary’s role during the week which the Easter rebellion lasted was restricted, not only by his ignominious confinement in the besieged Castle during the first day but also by the automatic assumption of power by the military authorities conducting the anti-insurgency campaign. Even before Birrell arrived from London and briefly superseded him as the senior civilian in Dublin, Nathan had undergone his final metamorphosis from the administrator of Ireland to a mere clerk. Without authority to interfere in military operations, the lieutenant-colonel submitted to the general, Sir John Maxwell, assigned from London to restore order in Dublin, and restricted himself to the supervision of the agencies transmitting information to Whitehall and the resumption of services interrupted during hostilities. During this time Nathan for once could not keep up the systematic diary entries with which he had always ended his day, even during his most hectic periods as a colonial governor, a sure indication that his inflexible routine had been unsettled by his first real war. One of the first such entries, as Dublin reverted to a semblance of calm, contained an omen of his destiny, for it recorded that while Nathan had been conferring with Birrell at the lodge the Chief Secretary had been told that his resignation had been accepted. Two days later Birrell telegraphed to Nathan from London: “Prime Minister thinks that you must share my fate” and Nathan at once wrote to Asquith “acquiescing readily in this decision”; the letter summed up neatly and revealingly Nathan’s highest priority in office, not only in Ireland but by implication in all his responsible posts: “The attempt to keep order in Ireland during the war has
failed and you will probably consider that I can no longer be usefully employed there".¹⁰³

Before the Royal Commission Nathan preserved to the last the reputation for loyalty and personal dignity which he cherished. He was the only senior official who made no attempt to exculpate himself by overt attacks on others, superior or subordinate, beyond his mildly derogatory remark that he thought that the superintending staff of the Dublin Metropolitan Police suffered from "a little lack of initiative". All the other official protagonists indulged in innuendo or outright accusation of their superiors or rivals, and in each case the finger pointed inexorably at Nathan. Wimborne and General Friend, both of whom could show that they had anticipated serious trouble but lacked the power to act on their own initiative, recalled occasions on and before the Easter weekend when Nathan had rejected their prophecies as unnecessarily gloomy. Birrell, too, wondered aloud whether "... Sir Mathew was more in a position" than he had been to receive and respond to warnings about what was going on "... in the minds, and in the cellars if you like, of the Dublin population". In fact, the only superior insight which Nathan revealed came after the event and resembled his cool and surprisingly sympathetic analysis of the Ashanti rebels' motives fifteen years earlier; alone among the witnesses, he acknowledged the "high character of some of the idealists who took part in the insurrection" and confessed that their campaign showed "greater organizing power and more military skill" than he had attributed to them in his reports. Ironically, one of Nathan's predecessors as a colonial governor told the Commission that "those who have been placed in the control of the Executive have been asleep"; Sir Henry Blake, once a policeman in Ireland and retired there after a long career as a governor, including a term in Hong Kong, felt no clemency towards a former colleague.¹⁰¹

That Nathan should appreciate too late to save himself the ingrained hostility to British rule in Ireland was a natural consequence of his experience in colonies whose rebels, actual and potential, drew on a more recent and less idealized recollection of their past. Nathan could not guess that the Irish poet W.B. Yeats was wrong when he declared in 1913: "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone. It's with O'Leary in the grave". In the minds of Patrick Pearse and his supporters there lived on a fervent patriotism for an Ireland that never existed but was to be, in a poetic gesture, revitalized by blood sacrifice.¹⁰² Pearse's romantic mysticism was the antithesis of Nathan's prosaic pragmatism and the price each paid for his involve-
ment in the Easter rising was appropriate to the level of his ambition, Pearse meeting the martyr's end he craved and Nathan falling into the official disgrace which is the careerist's death.

In the light of a remark by Sir James Barrie, perhaps the most popular playwright of Nathan's day, that a Scot's greatest attribute is that he will "... do nothing which might damage his career", there was a dramatic irony in the choice, as Nathan's pro tem successor in Ireland, of Sir Robert Chalmers, the same Scot whom Nathan had followed as chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue. As for Nathan's immediate future, Asquith's political star was in the descendant and his nemesis, in the dynamic form of Lloyd George, offered Nathan little hope of new distinctions, which the new prime minister preferred to sell rather than to use as rewards for past services. Nathan therefore returned with a show of pride to his old corps, the Royal Engineers, assigned to the doubly distasteful task of supervising the construction of defences for London. He was conscious of the implied fall from grace in this assignment: he told an Irish friend whom he had first met in the eighteen-nineties that he was performing "the sort of duty I was doing in the days before I met you". The wheel had come full circle, except that he was no longer a promising captain in his thirties but a superannuated lieutenant-colonel in his mid-fifties, his civilian career seemingly in ruins and his knowledge of engineering grown rusty during a quarter of a century of administrative work.

Discredited in the responsible sphere which he had entered through the back door, Nathan seemed destined only for temporary employment suitable for a refurbished soldier during the war and then for premature retirement to his Somerset manor house, thence to pepper the newspapers and a new generation of civil servants with blustering letters about the good old days of the Empire, similar in tone to that in which the elderly Sir Henry Blake had rebuked Nathan before the Royal Commission for his failure to provide in Ireland a "real control ... impartial and just".

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 5 March 1910.
2. The Royal Commission, headed by Lord Macdonnell, submitted annual verbatim reports of testimony from 1912 and a majority and minority report, including recommendations, in 1914; see Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, Cd. 7338, XVI (1914).
3. Nathan's testimony before the Macdonnell Commission, 2 Aug. 1912, Appendix

4. 21 Aug. 1912.

5. For Selborne's remarks, see 5 *Hansard*, Lords, XI (1912), 248-49, 27 Feb. 1912.

6. See, for example, the question by Mr. J. King and the prime minister's reply that he would allow a debate only "...if requested to do so by the responsible leaders of the Opposition", 5 *Hansard*, Commons, LI (1913), 374, 12 April 1913.

7. Cd. 7338, Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service (1914), p.44. This was the opinion of the majority of the Commission's members; the minority report (p.141) considered that the modified system of patronage in operation by 1914 was working satisfactorily and no longer smelled of jobbery.

8. 5 *Hansard*, LXIII (1914), 1630-31, 23 June 1914.

9. Ms. N. 156, Clarke to N., 24 Jan. 1913. Sixteen years older than Nathan, Clarke had hitherto advanced more slowly than his protege, waiting twelve years for his G.C.M.G., whereas Nathan had waited only five.


14. Ms. N. 46 (diary), 2 Oct 1911, records his attendance at the synagogue for the Day of Atonement service, though his association with the institution was never more than nominal, in the judgement of Rev. Raphael H. Levy, who kindly examined the synagogue records for references to Nathan (private communication, 22 Jan. 1966).


16. Bowlle, *Viscount Samuel*, does not dwell on Samuel's religious affiliation but demonstrates his pride in his cultural background when he later served as British High Commissioner in Palestine after the first world war, where he also took part in public celebrations of Jewish religious rituals.

17. Ms. N. 152 contains the letters of Violet Asquith (later Violet Bonham Carter) to Nathan, 1912-1934.

18. Violet Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill as I Knew Him* (London, 1965), p.380, recalling an incident in April 1915, when Violet was staying at the Chief Secretary's Lodge in Dublin and Nathan passed on to her a telephone message of the young poet's death.

19. Ibid., pp.133-34.


21. Ms. N. 46 (diary), 17 July 1911.


23. 5 *Hansard*, 2 July 1914 (Nathan family album of newspaper clippings).


25. Ms. N. 49 (diary), 29 July 1914.


27. Quoted in ibid., pp.64-65.

ENGLAND AND IRELAND


30. See, for example, the moderate editorial comments of the loyalist newspaper, *The Irish Times*, 5 Oct., and the bluntly worded criticism of Birrell in the radical *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Oct. 1914.

31. O'Broin, *Chief Secretary*, p.3.


34. Ms. N. 462, Birrell to N., 14 Dec. 1914. By March 1915, Birrell had decided to remain in office, a decision which Nathan greeted with an ingratiating letter in which he expressed his relief at this "momentous" news.

35. Ms. N. 449, Birrell to N., n.d. [ca Dec., 1915].

36. 7 Oct. 1914.


38. Ms. N. 448, Wimborne to N., 7 May 1916.


41. 15 April 1915.


43. Ms. N. 449, Birrell to N., 10 Nov. 1914, and 28 Feb. 1915.

44. Ms. N. 467, Nathan's notes of an interview with Lord Kitchener, 20 Nov.; Ms. N. 462, N. to Dillon, 30 Nov. 1914.


50. Ms. N. 449, Birrell to N., 8 Feb. 1915.

51. Ms. N. 466, N. to Birrell, 18 March 1916.


53. Ms. N. 455 contains Long's letters to Nathan in Ireland. See also Ms. N. 469 which includes Nathan's notes of interviews with Midleton and other Unionist leaders, 3 Dec. 1915, and 29 Feb. 1916.

SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

57. Hobhouse's letters to Nathan, containing constant references to the "great and endur­ing" Home Rule movement, are in Ms. N. 454.
58. Ms. N. 467 contains Nathan's notes of this conference, 16 Dec. 1914, and of a subse­quent meeting with the three leaders on 4 Feb. 1915.
60. Ms. N. 462, N. to Dillon, 30 Nov. 1914.
61. C.O.904/29, part 2, contains Nathan's repeated reminders to General Friend and his predecessor, 7 Jan.—18 March 1915, that the release of these arms had been authorized, and complaints which he directed to Redmond (18 Dec. 1914, and 14 May 1915) and to L.J. Kettle, the National Volunteers secretary (30 Nov. 1914) about the misuse of arms already in the possession of that body.
62. MacGiolla Choille, Intelligence Reports, pp.163-64.
63. Ms. N. 469 contains Nathan's notes of a discussion with Dillon, 16 March, and of the conference with the army and police commanders about The Gael, 17 March 1916, when Nathan argued against the raid on the press.
64. Ms. N. 466, N. to Birrell, 4 Jan. 1916.
65. See note 50, above.
68. Dillon to N., 28 May 1915, quoted in Lyons, John Dillon, pp.364-65; Ms. N. 469, Nathan's notes of an interview with Asquith, 16 Dec. 1915.
70. Ms. N. 466, N. to Birrell, 4 Jan. 1916.
72. Ms. N. 469, Nathan's notes of this interview, 29 Feb. 1916.
73. Ms. N. 466, N. to Birrell, 25 March and 22 April 1916.
74. Ibid., 4 April 1916.
75. C.O. 94/23, Crime Branch Special reports, 1916, containing reports from in­formers with noms de guerre like “Granite” and “Chalk”. These are reports from the provinces passed to the Royal Irish Constabulary. The potentially more revealing Dublin Metropolitan Police reports are not in the State Paper Office, Dublin, and are not available in the Public Record Office, London, though it is likely that they are contained in the sections of C.O. 903-906 at present under restriction for a hundred years. MacGiolla Choille, Intelligence Reports, p.xviii, notes that the D.M.P. submitted only a monthly precis of officers' reports to Dublin Castle, and it is therefore possible that Birrell's assertion before the Royal Commission that the Dublin police had failed to produce detailed evidence of the plans for the rising was substantially true; Nathan hinted at a similar grievance when he told the Commission (Evidence, p.15) that, while the R.I.C. was "highly efficient", he thought there was "a little lack of initiative in [the D.M.P.‘s] general superintending staff".
76. Royal Commission Evidence, p.34.
77. Ms. N. 448, Wimborne to N., 15 March 1916.
78. Ms. N. 466, N. to Wimborne, 7 April and N. to Birrell, 14 April 1916.
79. Birrell to Midleton, 25 Feb. 1916, quoted in O'Broin, Dublin Castle, p.65; in this
letter Birrell said; "I want to promote, both by action and inaction, the growth of loyalty towards the Empire in the new Ireland ..."

80. Though this damning letter was not produced before the Royal Commission, another by Nathan to Sir Cecil Macready, 10 April 1916, is reproduced in the Appendix to the Report; in that letter, Nathan said: "... I do not believe that [the Irish Volunteers] leaders mean insurrection, or that the Volunteers have sufficient arms to make it formidable ...").

81. Ms. N. 449, Birrell to N., 22 April 1916.
83. Ms. N. 51 (diary) records five private dinners between 3 Jan. and 18 Feb., 1916.
85. Ms. N. 51-52 (diaries), 1916-17. Since Nathan preserved no letters from this Mrs Hutchinson, it is not possible to identify her positively as Mrs Mary Hutchinson, whom Lytton Strachey described at this time as "the only sympathetic person in London" (Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, II, 244). Nathan had recently begun to be introduced into the circles in which Mrs Hutchinson moved through his friendship (discussed in Chapter 7) with Amber Blanco White.

86. Ms. N. 476 contains Estelle Nathan's letters to George Nathan for this period.
88. Ms. N. 466, N. to Birrell, 22 April 1916.
91. Royal Commission Evidence, p.3 and p.9.
92. See Wall, "Background to the Rising ...", *The Making of 1916*, pp.175-77, for an analysis of the splits between Connolly, the I.R.B. and MacNeill in this period.
95. Ms. N. 466, N. to Birrell, 4 Jan. 1916.
96. See Note 77, above.
98. Ms. N. 51 (diary), 1 May 1916.
100. Ms. N. 466, N. to Asquith, 3 May 1916.
102. There is a striking and soundly documented interpretation of the Easter rebels' motives in these terms in the article by the Irish scholar F.X. Martin, "The 1916 Rising—Coup d'Etat or Bloody Protest?", *Studia Hibernica* (1968), pp.106-137.
103. Ms. N. 466, N. to Mrs Alice Stopford Green, 4 June, 1916.
Of Nathan's rise, if not phoenix-like then at least with a remarkable display of powers of survival, from the ashes of Easter, 1916, it was said by a friend who was to figure largely in his private life over the next decade that "... the many friends he had taken pains to cultivate rallied round and put him back in the firmament". This is an overstatement, not only of the level which Nathan was to reach in the public service but also of the influence of the friends on whom he could call once Asquith fell in December, 1916. Unlike the evidence of string-pulling which survives in Nathan's papers for his desperate attempt to save himself from unemployment after his demise from Natal, there is only this single piece of hearsay to show that he owed to influential friends his rescue from the London defences and the resumption of his administrative career as the first secretary of the new Pensions Ministry which was improvised to meet some of the political promises made during the early years of the war to make Britain a land fit for heroes.

The responsibilities of this mammoth department, with over two thousand employees in London and almost three hundred voluntary committees to coordinate, had hitherto been distributed among the military services and the handing-over process proved so prolonged that complaints about the Ministry accumulated. Nathan's painful operation in 1916 diminished his legendary capacity for long sojourns at his desk and he found his efficiency under fire from two
successive ministers who questioned the secretary's ability to marshal the clerical forces of the department in order to cope with the backlog of claims and with appeals against the alleged injustice of pensions granted to ex-servicemen and their dependants. Brought into the coalition cabinet to strengthen its appearance of non-partisan solidarity, George Barnes and John Hodge were members of the Labour Party's right wing. With Hodge in particular, Nathan had little in common; the Scottish-born founder of the British Smelters' Association, who had represented the industrial Lancashire electorate of Gorton since 1906, was a self-made man in a sense in which Nathan could not, and would not, claim to be. A self-conscious product of the Victorian philosophy of self-improvement, Hodge flourished his humble origins as a badge of honour throughout his life, crusading for equal opportunity in education and preaching temperance to the working class. While chairman of the parliamentary Labour Party during the war, he was active in the Socialist National Defence Committee and has been identified with the extreme right wing and loyalist section of the party, a position in the political spectrum which he first marked out for himself when, as an unsuccessful candidate in the 1900 election, he scorned the proffered assistance of the socialist spokesman Keir Hardie. Even with such a political master, Nathan might have worked out a modus vivendi, however uncomfortable, if Hodge had been satisfied with his subordinate's endeavours. But Hodge found the Pensions Ministry a "terrible mess", the press "loud in its condemnation of the delays in awarding pensions" and the secretary averse to Hodge's proposal to reform the complex filing system by placing in sole charge of that aspect of operations Sir Woodburn Kirby, one of Nathan's assistants first singled out for promotion by George Barnes. Hodge instructed Nathan that neither he nor anyone else was to interfere with Kirby's work and then fired off a series of "caustic" minutes. These salvos attacked the general inefficiency of the department and in particular Nathan's failure to consult Hodge concerning a privately subscribed fund of £5000 intended to help claimants left destitute while the Ministry processed their applications. In 1918 an interview, recorded by Hodge, took place between him and the "dreadfully upset" Nathan, who complained that he was in "such a nervous condition" over the minister's reprimands that "he declared he could not do his work". Hodge replied that Nathan had treated him as if he were "non-existent": "... you have acted as Minister as well as Permanent Secretary". For only the second time in his career as a public servant, Nathan
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

seriously offered his resignation but at this stage Hodge refused to accept it, adding nevertheless that Nathan was to obey instructions to the letter in future. Hodge's account of the outcome of this confrontation, unique in its evidence that Nathan had begun to imbibe the emerging sense among civil servants that they were independent of the men who "ruled for the present", bears quotation:\footnote{1}

Sir Matthew Nathan was rather indiscreet. He declared to several of his colleagues that he would be there when I was gone. When this came to my knowledge, I called upon the Prime Minister [Lloyd George] and related the circumstances. He chuckled very heartily over the episode. When I demanded that he should find another job for Sir Matthew, the Prime Minister immediately thereafter found a position for him as Secretary of a Commission. Sir Matthew was never back at Pensions.

It is revealing to contrast this version of Nathan's demise from the Pensions Ministry with the account given by his nephew, based on Nathan's recollections. While admitting that the inefficiency of the department might have been a consequence of "... the undue attention given to detail and to records on the part of the secretary", Edward Nathan attributes his uncle's request for "leave" in 1918 to his poor health.\footnote{4} For his family's consumption, and indeed in the private papers he left concerning this phase of his career, Nathan was anxious to obscure this blot on his record of loyalty and efficiency, an effort in which he was probably aided by a minor inaccuracy in Hodge's account, for Nathan was in fact "back at Pensions" in 1919 in a voluntary capacity as a member of the Special Grants Committee which heard appeals against the levels of pensions granted by the Ministry. But his future prospects lay in a different direction, his first opportunity to revive his reputation and to cultivate useful friendships arising in a sphere in which he had never been active.

The militant suffragette movement before the war had stirred a reluctant government to the realization that concessions would have to be made at least in the field of social reform. The wartime necessity of drawing on women's labour to fill the gaps left by mobilization of men of military age added a moral imperative to this pragmatic promise. The job which Lloyd George found for Nathan was the secretaryship of a commission enquiring into the wisdom and justice of granting higher wages to women who had taken over tasks hitherto performed by men in industry and the public services. Despite his "liberal and un-Tory opinions",\footnote{5} Nathan was no enthusiast for women's emancipation; indeed, he had been sharply rebuked in Natal by a local suffragette for his temerity in including in a speech at a girls' school a remark that a woman's place was in
ENGLAND AND QUEENSLAND

the home. But several influences had been at work on his vaguely liberal predilections, at the personal level a stirring of conscience equivalent to that which had also made the Liberal Party aware that women's rights were among "... those causes which Liberalism ought to uphold". Among these influences was that of Beatrice Webb, the prominent Fabian and a convinced though not a militant feminist, whom Nathan had met after his return from Ireland and who later greeted his appointment as governor of Queensland with the exhortation that he should encourage that Australian state's "go-ahead" Labour Party government. Beatrice Webb remained a mere acquaintance; more influential in persuading Nathan of the need to support feminist demands for social and political rights was one of the clever young women who had taken on a wartime post in the Ministry of Labour and who there came into Nathan's ambit.

Mrs Amber Blanco White, formerly Amber Pember Reeves, introduced Nathan into the Fabian circle of Beatrice Webb and her husband, Sidney Webb, and herself became for a time the most intimate of Nathan's many women friends. In her early thirties when Nathan met her, Amber Blanco White was the daughter of the distinguished New Zealand socialist William Pember Reeves, who so admired the Fabian philosophy during his sojourn in London in the 1890s as the first New Zealand Agent-General that he named his only son after the society. Reeves became a prominent member of the Fabian movement and was later appointed director of the London School of Economics, the tertiary institution created to counter the political and academic conservatism of the older-established British universities. But it was Amber's mother Magdalene (Maud) who introduced her daughter into the conclaves of the Fabian Society; Mrs Pember Reeves's personality was as powerful as her husband's and her views were more radical, encompassing the suffragette cause which long remained too advanced for many of the male Fabians, including such luminaries as George Bernard Shaw. H.G. Wells, whose views on "free love" outraged the Webbs and discomfited Shaw, startled his Fabian friends by putting his ideas into spectacular practice by running off to France with Amber Pember Reeves, then twenty-two and recently graduated from Cambridge with first class honours in what was under the circumstances the ironically entitled Moral Sciences Tripos. Not content with the impact of this affair on his fellow Fabians, Wells publicized it to the world in his novel Ann Veronica whose heroine was patently Amber Pember Reeves and which propagated their joint philosophy of women's liberation, duly moderated to exclude militant action and to conform with Fabian
convictions about reform by persuasion. The scandal, like the novel's message, had a short life and Amber later married George Rivers Blanco White, a Cambridge graduate and barrister who later served in the war, and she bore his three children.

Against this background of tempestuous youth, Mrs Blanco White's relationship with Nathan, some twenty-five years older and aeons removed in temperament from Wells, was a curious friendship. Like Constance Heppell Marr, Mrs Blanco White apparently cultivated Nathan's acquaintance for the help he might give her, for she appealed to him in 1919 to intervene on her behalf when she was in danger of losing her Ministry of Labour job in the post-war retrenchment. Within a week she wrote to tell Nathan that she had found a new position with the Board of Trade. In the meantime, they had gone together to see the Russian Ballet, then the toast of the London stage, and to hear Fabian Society lectures by Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw.

On Nathan's side these public appearances in the company of a married woman, so markedly in contrast to his cautious meetings with Constance Heppell Marr, may be attributed to his recent release from the demands of decorum placed on him during his long marriage with a burgeoning career. On Mrs Blanco White's part, she confessed a need for the understanding ear of a mature and discreet friend. A declared Freudian, she later lent her support to H.G. Wells's contention that a woman whose children have outgrown the nursery stage will inexorably seek an outlet for her energies, whether respectably in playing bridge or more impetuously in extramarital escapades. Equally it was Amber whose views were reflected in Wells's description in the novel Ann Veronica of the heroine's musings as she sees her lover and her father confront each other:

> It was as if she had grown right past her father into something older and of infinitely wider outlook, as if he had always been unsuspectedly a flattened figure, and now she had discovered him from the other side.

Perhaps in Nathan, the man she later described as "dear, charming, impressive-looking", Amber found a satisfying amalgam of father and friend at a time when she was still groping for a "respectable" outlet for her considerable energies. Certainly in her candid and troubled letters to Nathan it requires an effort of the imagination to see the same self-assured author who later published solemn tracts on banking and propaganda techniques and who collaborated with Wells in his survey of The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind which appeared in 1932. But Amber was only toying with writing
when she first met Nathan and, with his encouragement, she produced in 1923 a satirical novel *Give and Take* which she dedicated to him with a slightly mocking disclaimer: “The characters and incidents of the novel are fictitious and all the facts are incorrect.”

The young Amber Pember Reeves had once earned from a disapproving Beatrice Webb the rebuke that she was “an amazingly vital person and I suppose very clever, but a terrible little pagan — vain, egotistical and careless of other people’s happiness.” This impetuosity was diminishing but had not disappeared when Amber met Nathan, though it is difficult to see in contemporary photographs of him — in his sixties, bald, bespectacled and stout — an obvious focus for the affection she poured out to him in letters written to him in Queensland and subsequently to his manor house in Somerset. And yet the letters are replete with confessions of her dependence on his advice and comfort and his few surviving replies contain what were for him almost adolescent gushes of emotion as he admitted to “…thinking of you — a not unusual thing” and signed himself “Yours with much love, M.N.”

After a decade of such close friendship, unique in Nathan’s relationships with women, the tone of the letters began to cool. Amber seemed slowly to outgrow Nathan, to see him “from the other side” as Ann Veronica had suddenly discovered her father, and many years later she was to recall him mainly for his failings, as a “philanderer, a man who thought women existed to serve him; a bit of a humbug too, and not very sincere”. The attraction of that “instinct for entertaining” which had commended Nathan to so many of his contemporaries had faded for the maturing Amber Blanco White. Nathan seemed to detect this as he apologized for being “cross” and “exasperating” in her company and as late as 1930, as he approached seventy years of age and the spectre of retirement, there is a note of appeal in his letter which ends: “Please believe in the permanency of the affection of, Yours always, M.N.”

Even this late-flowering relationship did not divert Nathan permanently from his career preoccupations, just as his mother’s devotion had not caused him in his youth to refuse overseas appointments in order to remain in London at her side. Approaching sixty and still short of his dotage when he left the Pensions Ministry, he had only his limited private means and a military pension, rapidly declining in real value, on which to maintain the standards suitable to an *arriviste* lord of the manor and a recently superseded senior civil servant. In 1919 he returned briefly to the Pensions Ministry in the unpaid post of chairman of the Special Grants Committee, while carrying on with
his work on the women’s wages committee and joining a new overseas settlement commission intended to find openings in the colonies and the United States for repatriated soldiers.17 His service as a governor, falling just short of the decade necessary to qualify him for a colonial pension, was a distant memory when his old Colonial Office superior George Fiddes summoned him in June 1920 to discuss “a matter which might be of personal interest to you”.18

Lord Milner, a former High Commissioner in South Africa who had entered politics and emerged as Secretary of State for the Colonies, had put forward Nathan’s name as a candidate for the vacant governorship of Queensland. If approved, the appointment would allow Nathan to qualify for a pension as an act of imperial grace and favour.19 With the kind of coincidence which was far from exceptional in the narrow circle of governors who had filled colonial appointments in the consolidation phase of British imperial rule, the vacancy in Queensland had been created by the ill health of the incumbent, Sir Henry Goold Adams, who had been governor of the Orange River Colony when Nathan was in Natal. Goold Adams was desperately ill (he died in South Africa on his way home to England) and his sudden departure from Queensland left a politically embarrassing gap at Government House.

The Queensland Labor government led by Edward Theodore had already indicated, in company with the Australian Labor Party, a hostility to the institution of governorships and in particular to the appointment of “imperial” governors from London. But the situation was complicated by the fact that Queensland’s Chief Justice, normally the acting governor under the Australian constitution, was Sir Pope Cooper, a man of independent views who had clashed with Queensland governments of various political hues, including the conservative administration of Sir Samuel Griffith who had started Cooper on his rise through the state’s judicial ranks.20 In a move of constitutional dubiousness which caused disquiet in London, the Theodore government seized the opportunity to pass over Cooper and to appoint as acting governor a Labor member of the Legislative Council, William Lennon, who actually stepped down as president-elect of the upper house to take up the new office. In defiance of the spirit if not the letter of the constitution, Theodore used Lennon’s vice-regal prerogative to swamp the nominated Legislative Council with Labor appointees, to counter the opposition to Theodore’s legislative programme which had been put up by the Nationalist and Country Party majority in that house of review. It was on a lesser scale a reprise of the drama in which Asquith had been the main
actor in Britain in 1910-11, but with a new final act in which Queensland's house of privilege refused, like the British House of Lords, to "die in the dark" by abandoning their power of veto. Lennon as the king's representative, like George V a newcomer to his high office, had nevertheless shown far less reluctance to exercise his archaic right to create the colonial equivalent of peerages to fill the upper house with political appointees.21

The Colonial Office watched with barely suppressed horror as a succession of socialist measures passed through the swamped Council and came on to London for the formality of royal assent; exclamations of "drastic" and "remarkable" dotted the internal minutes of the Office and a junior clerk declared that "a kind of tyranny" had sprung up overnight in Queensland.22 Sir Henry Lambert, an old Colonial Office hand, drew an ominous analogy with the situation in Natal in 1907, when "all South Africa knew that Natal was wrong but they would not openly take our side".23 However, it was not the imperial government but absentee British investors who were directly affected by Theodore's determination to control the Queensland economy by holding down prices and lifting land rents, and the Colonial Office assured Nathan that in Queensland he would face no difficult questions of imperial intervention such as those in which he had become so unhappily involved in Natal.24

The post-war definition of "dominion status" for former colonies, like those in Australia, which had acquired independence from all but vestigial submission to Britain (contained in such constitutional provisions as the retention of governors and governor-general, and the more significant survival of the right of appeal against Australian courts' decisions in the British Privy Council) was sufficiently clear even by 1920 to make London hold its hand before presuming to withhold assent for Theodore's legislation. To stiffen this self-denying resolve at the Colonial Office, as well as to conciliate London financiers, Theodore arrived in Britain in mid-1920, closely pursued by a delegation of his political opponents, led by Sir Robert Philp, bent on stirring up "home" opinion against the Queensland prime minister. Although Philp failed to secure the disallowance of the pastoral leases bill, the Colonial Office concluding after a lengthy internal debate that assent could not be refused on grounds of constitutionality or of "natural justice" to British investors, Milner decided that Theodore must not be given "... any other opportunity of acting unconstitutionally as he had when he packed the Legislative Council". Although the governorship of another state,
Victoria, had been vacant longer than that of Queensland, Milner determined to send out Nathan to act as a brake, assuring him (in Nathan’s paraphrase) that “... this action [of swamping the Council] could scarcely have been forced on a Governor. It was not likely to be repeated while I was out there”.25

There was some speculation in Queensland at the time that Theodore had hoped to persuade Milner to appoint an Australian as governor of Queensland, and certainly the Philp delegation petitioned the Secretary of State to retain the practice of sending out an Englishman whose impartiality might be generally accepted. The private interview with Theodore which Nathan had to undergo in order to secure the Queensland prime minister’s approval for his appointment as an “imperial” governor must therefore have been something of an ordeal and it would be illuminating to know whether more passed between them than the mere exchange of pleasantries in Nathan’s laconic record of the discussion. Since Theodore did not raise an objection, it is possible that Nathan made some play with the Fabian sympathies, or at least acquaintances, which he had acquired while associated with Amber Blanco White; certainly he replied to Beatrice Webb’s congratulatory letter, in which she urged him to encourage Queensland’s “go-ahead” Labor government, that he looked forward with enthusiasm to witnessing Theodore’s implementation of policies which she and her associates had been pressing on successive British governments. His only anxiety, a striking admission on the part of a governor who in Hong Kong had allegedly stressed pomp and ceremony on Government House social occasions, concerned “... the slight absurdity of keeping up a small modicum of state in the midst of a rather rough people living simply”.26 In the event, he had another reason to feel anxious; the Colonial Office delayed the announcement of the appointment while trying to reassure Theodore and Philp that Nathan was a suitable compromise candidate, after an official protest, telegraphed by Lennon from Queensland, reported rumours circulating there that Philp had actually nominated Nathan.27

Consequently, Nathan did not leave London until October of 1920 and reached Brisbane, the Queensland capital, in December, a year after Lennon had taken office as acting governor. The tranquil dénouement to a long career which Nathan anticipated was shattered even before he reached Queensland. Labor Party opinion in Queensland was still sensitive to suggestions that an imported governor had been imposed on them in response to the opposition’s demands and, when Nathan’s ship called at Adelaide and a South
Australian journalist reported him as saying that the Philp delegation had been “responsible” for his appointment, the Brisbane Courier, an influential Queensland newspaper hostile to Theodore, printed the story with undisguised glee. Theodore promptly cabled from London his “surprise” at Nathan’s statement and the new governor’s first official task was to extract from the Adelaide reporter a telegraphed admission that he had wrongly “interpolated” the remark in his report of the interview with Nathan, having earlier discussed the Philp delegation’s objectives with its leader as he passed through South Australia.  

The appearance of this retraction two days before his arrival in Brisbane smoothed Nathan’s path and the Courier welcomed him as a non-partisan governor who had already declared himself a “whole-hearted supporter of the White Australia policy”, those notorious immigration laws, designed to exclude all but European settlers, which were strongly defended by all Queensland political parties. Nathan had told the press in Melbourne that his experiences of a multi-racial society in South Africa had disillusioned him permanently about the feasibility of integrating non-whites into a society controlled by Europeans and added that, if it had proved an impossible task in Africa, where Europeans were in a minority, it must be doubly difficult in Australia, whose white population dominated not only in power but in numbers. Echoing his remarks in the preface to Maurice Evans’s book on Natal a decade earlier, Nathan declared that white Australians would be in danger of growing physically and culturally degenerate if they failed to resist the temptation of importing labour from Asia or the Pacific islands to carry out the great task of developing an under-populated continent. These were welcome sentiments from the mouth of a governor under suspicion of cherishing an ambition to obstruct Queensland’s government and, in his speech in reply to the loyal address he received in Brisbane, Nathan extended another olive branch by describing the state as a shining example of a new society in which “… the chosen representatives of the people, unhampered by obsolete patterns, untrammelled by out-of-date tools, forge the solutions of great economic, administrative and financial problems on which the happiness of the people and of their children must depend”. Allowing for the conventionally formal and unspecific language of such speeches, the sympathy for Labor aspirations which these remarks reveal was genuine enough; in a royal audience before he left London, Nathan countered the reservations which the king had expressed about Queensland’s “labour tendencies” by asserting
that Theodore seemed clever and might yet prove to be a statesman.  

Experience confirmed Nathan's estimate of the Queensland "prime minister" (the practice of-reserving this title for the federal leader, and of indicating the states' declining prestige and power by calling their first ministers "premiers", had not yet become standard). In his first "affairs report", a massive document which signalled Nathan's determination to wax as industrious as of old, if he could not be so powerful, he bracketed Theodore with the Roman Catholic Archbishop James Duhig as "the two most capable and most ambitious men in the country". Posterity has echoed this assessment of Theodore, despite his later and politically damaging sally into national politics as Federal Treasurer during the nineteen-thirties depression, though an historian of the Catholic church in Australia has described Duhig as "essentially ordinary", with a temperamental inclination towards "... the avoidance of conflict, of politics, of arousing animosity". Despite his admiration for these publicly prominent figures, Nathan was unable to establish a cordial relationship with either; Jewish, liberal in a cautious vein, still receptive to new ideas, he nevertheless symbolized, as an imported governor, the conservative (and Anglican) establishment and, more damaging to his hopes of gaining acceptance with the state's large Catholic population, as a former under-secretary in Ireland he was linked with memories of anti-Sinn Fein policies which recently renewed "troubles" there in the early nineteen-twenties had served to perpetuate. Even the final transition to home rule in Ireland did not still the suspicions of Nathan which lingered in Queensland Catholic circles and Duhig, alone among Brisbane church leaders, made no move to pay his formal respects to the new governor. Nathan asked Theodore to intercede by passing on to the archbishop an assurance that the governor had "... a strong desire not to feel... more in touch with one portion of the people than with another". Since Queensland Catholics constituted a quarter of the state's population, Nathan's overture was politic, rather than merely magnanimous, and at the interview with Duhig which followed, the archbishop was at pains to instruct the acolyte resident in Government House about the local Protestants' "... fear of [Catholics] in high places because of their association with Labor". The ecumenical acquaintance did not blossom and, while Duhig later complimented the governor's "delicate thoughtfulness" and Nathan referred to the archbishop as "a rather remarkable man", they were never met again except on ceremonial occasions.
While Duhig's aloofness was to prove no more than a minor handicap to Nathan, Theodore's was a source of continuing anxiety. Knowing to his cost the problems faced by a governor who lacked the confidence of his first minister, even in a constitutional situation in which that minister was the true head of government and not merely the governor's "chief adviser", Nathan might have been expected from the outset to woo Theodore, as he had failed to win Moor in Natal. But Theodore was not a man for warm friendships; his nickname "Red Ted" was an opposition barb which stuck rather than an affectionate term of address employed by faithful followers, who stood in awe of his political prowess and powerful personality. An officer of the Queensland parliament who observed Theodore in action in and outside the fully elected Legislative Assembly conceded that the prime minister was a clever and far-seeing politician but noted that even his closest acquaintances found him "secretive" and "sphinx-like", inclined to stride the corridors of power as if he had "... the cares of a wide universe on his shoulders, instead of the minor cares of a State". Even a sympathetic biographer has recently depicted Theodore as "an aloof character with a gold-mounted walking stick" whose less than humble origins did not prevent him from manipulating "the appeal of anti-imperialism in Labor politics".

Such a calculating politician was bound to assert his complete independence of Government House, especially when its occupant had taken up residence against the preference of the party he led, and an opportunity soon arose to put Nathan in his place. In a repetition, though on a lesser scale, of Nathan's contretemps with Carter in Natal over his lack of discretion in circulating among civil servants a document which revealed the differences of opinion between the governor and the Moor cabinet, Theodore buttonholed Nathan after an Executive Council meeting to protest against the "new practice" of summoning public officials to Government House for consultation. In fact, Nathan had merely sought from a Treasury official some statistical information which he wanted to include in his despatch on a new bill to control Brisbane tramways fares but Theodore objected to his having secured this information direct from an official, instead of requesting it through the responsible minister. It is likely that Theodore knew of Nathan's personal reservations about the bill, which he later voiced in a discussion with Theodore's deputy in terms which implied his disapproval of a measure to protect city dwellers against price rises at a time when the government was raising pastoral rents to mulct the major country
landholders. Sensitive to the impact on London financial circles of his “repudiation” of the original terms of these pastoral leases, Theodore was probably more anxious than usual about the tone of despatches sent by the governor to the Colonial Office but his rebuke to Nathan was phrased in polite language and rested exclusively on procedural niceties, though its reference to trouble in the past with Sir Pope Cooper, who had been inclined when acting governor to quote civil servants against their political masters, carried an obvious threat. Nathan answered that a governor of his experience would scarcely fall into such a grievous error and there for the time being the matter rested.40

It was a chronic fault of former Crown colony governors translated to territories in which they had solely ceremonial functions to exceed their authority by disagreeing with entirely local policy decisions of elected ministries. Nathan had already shown a propensity for this kind of intervention in his overt opposition to the pattern of electoral distribution in Natal and his consequent championing of Durban’s interests in the unification negotiations in South Africa. Though less openly, he repeated this behaviour in Queensland when the Theodore government announced a decision to levy compulsory loans from all citizens whose incomes exceeded £1,000 a year. This thinly disguised super-tax was intended to serve a double purpose: to lend a semblance of credibility to Labor’s election promises to level out the economic strata of a state whose industrialization lagged behind that of its more populous southern counterparts; and to tide the Treasury over the shortage of ready funds which followed the “repudiation” crisis in the London loans market. Aware of the Colonial Office’s concern about the growing hostility of London’s “City” financiers towards Queensland, Nathan took it upon himself to tell Theodore in private that he was “… definitely of the opinion that a compulsory loan would prejudice the position of Queensland when the renewal of [London] loans became necessary”. The prime minister not only refused at this stage to reconsider the measure but rejected Nathan’s request that reference to it be omitted from the governor’s traditional speech at the opening of parliament,41 though under the subsequent and severe attack from the press and the opposition the bill was not pressed beyond the second reading.42

Although his advice was no more than a murmur among much more influential opinion against the compulsory loan, Nathan seems to have concluded once the bill was dropped that he was free to intercede with his ministers on other contentious matters. One such is-
issue, long debated in the Queensland political arena, was the status and composition of the Legislative Council. Lennon's swamping of that house with Labor nominees in 1920 was the culmination of a phase in this debate in which the Council had grown increasingly intransigent in its attitude towards the elected Assembly, and of an even longer-standing dispute over the upper house's most jealously guarded power, that of amending "money bills" passed by a majority of the Assembly. Not only Labor but conservative governments of Queensland had objected to the Legislative Council's interference with their measures; William Kidston, premier in a self-styled "Liberal" administration, made the first inroads into the upper house's powers in 1908 when he legislated for a referendum to be held automatically whenever the Legislative Council rejected an Assembly bill passed in consecutive sessions. Regarding this arrangement as unwieldy, Thomas Ryan's Labor government decided in 1917 to use the referendum apparatus to test public opinion on the principle of abolishing the upper house. The plebiscite produced a clear majority in favour of retaining the Legislative Council but the issue was clouded by the return of Ryan's government with massive public support. Ryan, and then Theodore as his successor, proceeded with attempts to legislate the Council out of existence but the anti-Labor members of that house, appointed for life, consistently declined to vote for their own demise.

Constitutional devices having failed, Labor turned, with the convenient assistance of Goold Adams's retirement as governor, to the questionable tactic of packing the Council with its own nominees; Lennon alone created fourteen new M.L.C's, thus straying far from the unwritten agreement that the Council's numbers should never exceed two-thirds of those in the elected Assembly. Inheriting this fait accompli, Nathan was not at first alarmed by the imbalance between the houses. The imperial government had given its tacit consent to Lennon's actions and in any case Theodore seemed content to use his henchmen in the Council merely to approve legislation foreshadowed in his election platform. This restraint was a consequence of an "undertaking" which Theodore had given to the Colonial Office, while he was in London, not to use the Lennon nominees to abolish the Legislative Council until a new Assembly election had been held. The snap poll of October 1920, in which Labor was returned but with serious losses, was regarded by Nathan as a public rejection of the party's plan to abolish the upper house and he felt secure against another immersion in constitutional wrangles like those which had bedevilled his Natal term.
It was therefore with acute apprehension, personal as well as official, that Nathan received the news from Theodore that Labor proposed to use its Legislative Council numbers to sweep away the upper house during the 1921 parliamentary session. As if this looming crisis was not enough to disturb a governor hoping for an uncontentious term, Theodore followed with another bill which reinforced the likelihood that Nathan would be petitioned to recommend that the royal assent should be refused for a Queensland measure. Theodore legislated to bring Queensland into conformity with those other Australian states in which Labor governed by compulsorily retiring judges at the age of seventy but he also proposed to include a contentious clause denying judges the pension granted to them elsewhere. This clause raised constitutional questions about judicial independence of the executive and reinforced cries of “repudiation”. Nathan was not spared the embarrassment of having to receive deputations, first of outraged judges led by Sir Pope Cooper, who accused Theodore of personal retaliation against him as Chief Justice for his refusal to follow political directives, and then of Theodore’s political opponents, equating the assault on the judiciary with the threat to the Legislative Council as intolerable attacks on the British tradition of deliberative review by politically “neutral” institutions. Apparently at the behest of these plaintiffs, Nathan advised a sympathetic Colonial Office that Theodore’s convictions should be tested by reserving the bill on judges’ retirement for submission to the Crown law officers, in the belief that its disallowance might force the prime minister to reconsider his designs on the Legislative Council. But the law officers found “no legal impediment” to the judges’ bill and Nathan was obliged to sign it into law without demur as soon as he received this “advice”, which for a governor amounted to an unqualified directive.

This momentary display of self-assertion, confined to Nathan’s correspondence with London and not divulged to Theodore, was his last sally into the realm of politics in Queensland. If the imperial government saw his reserve powers as obsolescent, Nathan treated them henceforth as a dead letter. The deputation of opponents to Theodore’s abolition of the Legislative Council which waited on the governor in mid-November found him in an unsympathetic mood, expressing his “unofficial opinion” that if he refused to assent to the bill a “cry of imperial interference” would be raised by the Labor party to such effect that it would kill the opposition’s chances in the next election. His official despatch outlining his reasons for deciding not to reserve the abolition bill omitted this dangerous reference to
electoral prospects but he wrote privately to Churchill that he did not consider it reasonable to allow the anti-Labor elements in Queensland to lean on the imperial government for support "... when they have failed to help themselves." As evidence of the opposition's weakness, Nathan pointed to the fact that Theodore had been able to push the abolition bill through both houses in less than an hour and a half; even the anti-government *Brisbane Courier* had been obliged to admit that the opposition had been too disunited to put up an effective fight. Queensland thereafter became the only Australian state with a unicameral legislature, a situation which A.B. Keith, smarting from the breach of faith which he considered Theodore had committed in failing to put the abolition principle to the test of a referendum, later described as "inevitable" once the Labor government decided to ignore the 1917 referendum result.

With a year of his term behind him and the most controversial bill duly signed into law, Nathan looked forward to the prospect of a serene swansong to his colonial career. But Theodore was not ready to drop the initiative he had seized from the imperial government in constitutional questions; having expressed to Nathan his "relief" at the governor's decision not to reserve for formal assent the abolition bill, the prime minister apparently concluded that London, and Nathan, would be inclined to place no obstacle in the path of his administration. In August of 1922 a parliamentary crisis seemed imminent when Labor's slim majority in the Legislative Assembly melted away during an influenza epidemic and the opposition, with a rare unity, refused to give the usual "pairs" for stricken Labor members, thus threatening a reverse for the Theodore government on a major bill which would force its resignation.

Forewarned of the danger when the opposition defeated a minor measure, Theodore secured an adjournment and cast about for a solution. To Nathan's dismay, Theodore settled on a novel device of legislating for a proxy vote by members absent because of illness, a departure from British parliamentary practice intended in Nathan's judgement for "... no other purpose than to keep the present Government in office". He was so shocked by this corruption of the mother parliament's traditions that he responded sympathetically to an opposition deputation by referring to London and the Queensland Chief Justice for advice as to the propriety of his refusing to recognize Theodore as the legitimate representative of the electorate if he clung to power on proxy votes. These legal advisers told him that there were no grounds for such a refusal and Nathan was obliged to approve the amending bill, though he took the exceptional
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

step of confessing his anger to the clerk of the Assembly who brought the document to Government House for signature. Since Theodore did not follow the usual course of seeking the governor’s signature during an Executive Council meeting, it seems clear that he was aware of Nathan’s personal disapproval of this new display of Labor’s contempt for those “obsolete patterns” and “out-of-date tools” which Nathan had himself described as inappropriate to Queensland’s needs when he first landed in Brisbane. A year of practical association with a Labor administration, from which in his letter to Beatrice Webb he had anticipated so much social concern and trail-blazing innovation, had reduced Nathan to almost total disillusionment.

This state of mind accounts for the heightened hearing with which Nathan picked up rumours that Theodore planned to follow his success in removing one anachronism, in the shape of the privileged upper house, by moving to abolish another, the institution of the governorship. Sensitive to the unpopularity of his office in Queensland Irish circles, Nathan first tackled the prime minister about these rumours after an Executive Council meeting near the end of 1921 but found Theodore inclined to “treat the matter as a jest”. But Nathan concluded that this jocularity masked an embarrassment about discussing the subject in earnest and he informed the cabinet at once that he did not wish “…to remain in a place where the majority of the people did not want me”.

That Nathan’s uneasiness persisted is evident from his frequent references in private and official correspondence to the uncertain future of the governorship in Queensland. Recalling his experiences during the consolidation phase of imperial administration, he wrote to his counterpart in the Australian state of Victoria that the Colonial Office which “…in the old days used to like plenty of information” now preferred to receive it “…in the case of Self-Governing Dominions from other than gubernatorial sources”; in Queensland, he complained, he was merely required to travel and to make gracious speeches, the notes for which already ran to nearly a thousand typewritten pages of foolscap paper. Clerks in the newly renamed Dominions Office often commented on the “wearisome prolixity” of Nathan’s despatches but they recognized that, for “a man of his energy and capacity”, the “largely ornamental” position he occupied in Queensland must have pushed him into indulging his enthusiasm for amassing detailed reports. They might have remarked more profoundly that these reports, which persistently took the form of seeking advice and direction, indicated a decline in his “capacity” in keeping with his advancing years.
ENGLAND AND QUEENSLAND

Even the jaundiced eyes of the Dominions Office clerks were caught by a reference in one of Nathan’s weighty despatches to a discussion with Theodore in March, 1923, in which Nathan had offered to resign if this would “facilitate” the plan of the federal Labor party either to abolish Australian governorships or to fill them, in states governed by Labor, with Australian appointees. The Dominions Office quickly reminded Nathan that the imperial government’s policy was to continue sending governors from London, and to retain those already in office, until the six states could reach unanimity on the question. Testing the proposal at the 1924 conference of state premiers, Theodore received the enthusiastic support only of Tasmania’s Joseph Lyons, though in the following year the Labor party, by then in power in all states except Victoria, agreed to press for the appointment of Australians to vacant governorships in future.

For Nathan the unexpected consequence of these delicate political manoeuvres was his sudden transformation from a barely tolerable ornament in Queensland’s social life to the object of Theodore’s anxious wooing. In August, 1924, just as Nathan’s initial three year term was drawing towards its end, Theodore unexpectedly pressed the “imported” governor to stay on. Labor governments in that month were in office in all states except New South Wales and Theodore clearly hoped that a Labor victory there in the following year, and the survival of the teetering Prendergast Labor administration in Victoria, might give him the unanimous vote in favour of “Australian” governors which the Dominions Office regarded as essential before the prevailing practice of sending out British state governors could be stopped. If Theodore’s hopes were fulfilled at the 1925 conference of state premiers, he would be left with a recently arrived “imported” governor for almost three years before Queensland could instal another Lennon. Committed by his earlier promise to “facilitate” Theodore’s plans, Nathan agreed to prolong his term until the 1925 premiers’ conference could decide the fate of “imported” governors. But an unexpected telegram from London weakened his resolve; the Colonial Office asked him whether he would be available to assume the governorship of Ceylon. This prospect must have been all but irresistible. Ceylon had been, during Nathan’s earlier colonial career, the most prized governorship, occupied by such of his predecessors as Sir Henry Blake and Sir Henry McCallum, and appointment to it would have erased from Nathan’s career the imprint of anti-climax which his grace-and-favour posting to Queensland had left on it. However, further com-
munications from London added an unhappier anti-climax; the Colonial Office had been merely short-listing candidates, not offering Nathan the job, and the name which emerged at the head of the list was that of Sir Hugh Clifford, Lugard’s successor as governor of Nigeria. The dark days of Natal returned to haunt Nathan, for in 1909 he had rejected as “second class” the offer of a Nigerian post which, if he had taken it in preference to the secretaryship of the Post Office, would have allowed him to avoid the Irish fiasco and to earn by continuous colonial service a degree of acceptance as a “professional” governor. Equally valuable, it would have provided him with the cachet of service in Nigeria which lifted to successful careers such governors as Clifford, Sir Donald Cameron, Sir Edouard Girouard, Sir Hesketh Bell and Sir Alan Burns in the inter-war years when Africa became the most fruitful area in which colonial service officers could find promotion and prestige.

Clifford hesitated, and then accepted the offer of Ceylon, and Nathan was left with the meagre consolation of a telegram from the Secretary of State thanking him for his “public spirited offer” to stay on in Queensland; the sting in the tail was the final phrase in the telegram, informing Nathan that the Colonial Office had located “another very good candidate for Ceylon”. At the age of sixty-two, the durable Nathan was looking at last at the end of a career remarkable for its repeated recovery from apparently disastrous setbacks. In keeping with the spirit of his motto, “never ask, never refuse”, he refrained from official comment on the disappointment which he inevitably felt. Financially his situation was satisfactory, though not robust; he reported to the king that he had been able to make ends meet out of his Queensland salary, with its various allowances, and his military pension, and he had already lent credibility to his assurances to Theodore that he did not wish to be a burden on the state by volunteering to forego a proposed increase in his entertainment allowance when it came under fire from the Labor members in the Legislative Assembly. His health remained adequate for the ceremonial functions he was to perform during the balance of his extended term, though he was stouter, shorter of sight and more dependent on a walking stick than in his vigorous years as a Crown colony governor, especially in west Africa where “bush” tours were a demanding part of his duties.

In his farewell speech in Brisbane late in 1925, Nathan hinted that he had begun to find even the less demanding tours of the Queensland country something of a trial: “The extent to which [ the governor’s duties] may be arduous depends entirely on the view he
takes of them. I have held, here and elsewhere, that they cannot be effectively carried out unless he devotes to them his whole time and energy, that they require that he should get to know the conditions of all parts of the country and the interests of all sections of the people and he should devote the knowledge and influence so acquired to the improvement of those conditions and the promotion of those interests." Especially once he became a "rump" governor merely serving out the extension of his term with the primary objective of avoiding any further clash with the Queensland government, Nathan's political influence was minimal but he carried with him sufficient social grace to impress Dame Nellie Melba, the celebrated prima donna whom he met in Melbourne when he toured the southern states in 1922.64

Charles Bernays, the senior parliamentary clerk in Queensland, described Nathan as "an ideal governor [who] left Queensland with the good will and respect of politicians of every colour", though Bernays emphasized that Nathan had reaped this reward by avoiding "contentious issues".65 In adopting this approach, Nathan was probably influenced as much by local opinion as by his native caution, for he had reacted sensitively early in his term when a Labor member of the Assembly remarked during a debate that he had "... a strong objection to His Excellency telling them what they should do .... he did not want His Excellency to set out to teach him when His Excellency himself required to be taught".66 It is notable that, after the crisis over the abolition of the Legislative Council, Nathan took care to screen from the public gaze his disapproval of Theodore's manipulation of the state's constitution, even when the prime minister hinted at an intention to prolong the life of the twenty-second parliament beyond its allotted three year term. Reporting this proposal to London after a discussion with Theodore, Nathan remarked: "I did not comment on this opinion".67

Nathan's behaviour in Natal was therefore repeated in Queensland; he had to learn again, though less painfully the second time, that his position was one "... requiring no capacity and involving no responsibility".68 In the light of this assessment of his role, it was fitting that his epitaph in Queensland was the failure of a scheme originating in the Brisbane City Council to finance the publication of extracts from his gubernatorial addresses, a proposal which the Brisbane Courier, generally sympathetic in its treatment of Nathan, condemned as "a foolish undertaking, bound to be a financial failure ... [for] 'uplift' books usually fall flat on the market".69 Nathan's hope, expressed in a letter to Lord Stradbroke, that no one would be
“the worse” for hearing his speeches was overwhelmed by the *Courier*’s pragmatic view that no one would be the better for reading them. Perhaps the newspaper’s editorial writer had in mind the rather vacuous peroration of Nathan’s farewell address, in which he heralded the dawning of a “new day” in which the citizens of Queensland would seize their opportunity “… to assuage sectarian and political differences and to amalgamate classes so that in the end all classes will be one”.

This was a strikingly naive note on which to end a public career which had witnessed at first hand some of the more significant schismatic movements in the Empire which was Nathan’s *raison d’etre*. Resistance to British hegemony in the Sudan and Sierra Leone, the stirrings of proto-nationalism in the Gold Coast, overtly separationist movements in South Africa and Ireland, assertive nationalism in Queensland—none of these trends towards the dismantling of global empire had served to destroy Nathan’s confidence in the sweet reasonableness of men who had shared the boon of British tutelage, even when he reported to his monarch the “perverted idealism” of republican elements in the Queensland Labor party, the distressing “Sinn Fein” leanings of the state’s Catholic population and the general laziness of the Australian people, on whom nevertheless he rested his hopes of a “new day” of classless bliss.

Coming at the end of his public career, there is an unusual significance in Nathan’s otherwise unnoteworthy response to a request from a United States publisher for biographical material to be included in a proposed encyclopedia of “the lives of twentieth century statesmen”. While there is in it some of the idiosyncrasy which made him react so heatedly when E.D. Morel published his portrait in the journal *West Africa* twenty years earlier, Nathan’s refusal to be included in the encyclopedia contains a revealing self-assessment: "I do not feel … that I would be justified in telling [the public] details of what has been, after all, a very ordinary career of a servant of the British Crown. It has been the sort of life that one hopes may be remembered by a few friends but is otherwise scarce worthy of record in this world.

The air of grateful submission to the obscurity of retirement in this letter to an unknown correspondent is obvious; the “good public servant of the state” Nathan had set out to become was now going on to his well-earned reward “in this world”, doffing the vice-regal plumes and dropping the staff of office, to don the dressing gown and to take up the quill of a closeted student of the remote past.
With a colonial pension to supplement his military one, Nathan set off from Queensland on a lengthy and leisurely tour of China and the United States before settling finally into his house in Somerset, there to assume the role of benevolent and public-spirited lord of the manor and to receive a constant flow of visitors from London and the colonies in which he had served. But the life of rustic retirement deemed by novelists to be appropriate for a former governor who also had the suitably eccentric title of "Colonel" by which to be addressed by deferential local residents was not sufficient to satisfy a man of Nathan's legendary powers of application. During his last thirteen years of life, Nathan filled his leisure with the antiquarian interests which had earlier stimulated him to compile chronological lists of Gold Coast and Hong Kong history; the massive *Annals of West Coker*, published almost twenty years after his death, was only an abridged version of the original manuscript, edited by M.M. Postan who found it necessary as a professional medievalist to correct and exclude repetitious and inaccurate sections of Nathan's *magnum opus*. This zeal for the preservation of local historical records made Nathan an energetic member of national and county societies dedicated to archaeological and historical work and he became a vice-president of the Royal Geographical Society. It is an indication of the alacrity with which Nathan cast off active connections with the colonies he had governed that he did not resume his participation in the work of the Royal African Society, founded in memory of Mary Kingsley, a society whose president he had been from 1913 to 1917. His concern for England was paramount, in contrast to Lugard, who devoted his retirement to writing and political work concerning the African colonies and who became the most celebrated publicist of that continent's potential and of its administrative challenge. Nathan confined his last public labours, for a country he knew, to his chairmanship of a committee which sponsored scientific research on Queensland's Great Barrier Reef, and, for those he had nearly known, to his membership of the Royal Commission on the Ceylon constitution. The remainder of his energies spared from his historical research he devoted to county affairs, serving as High Sheriff of Somerset in 1934 and so adding a final badge of social acceptance to his record of surmounting his Jewish origins to become a leader among the gentry. He compiled a lengthy list of credits on national commissions and charitable committees, ranging from committees which reported on rubber imports and irrigation research to the City of Westminster Health Society and the Friends of the Hebrew
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

University of Jerusalem, the latter his sole concession in later life to the cause of preserving a culture which he had long since deserted in favour of that of his land of birth.\textsuperscript{75}

Alone except for his solicitous nephews, and driven from his desk only in the last few weeks by the pain of angina, Nathan died at West Coker on 18 April, 1939. Loyal in death to the religion of his fathers, he was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Willesden, a London suburb. His memorial in the manor house he loved was an impressive library wing, which he built to house his extensive collection of books and private papers, and an inscription in the entrance which recorded his occupancy of the house and the "inspiration" of his life for his friends. Some of those friends later financed the publication of \textit{The Annals of West Coker} and marked Nathan's devotion to West Coker by erecting in the village a bus shelter, the carved inscription on which includes, in an apparently unintentional recognition of Nathan's success in resting a foot in the nominally Christian society of England, two crosses alongside the dates of his birth in 1862 and his death in 1939.

\section*{NOTES AND REFERENCES}

1. O'Broin, \textit{Dublin Castle}, p.175, quoting Mrs Amber Blanco White's recollections almost fifty years after the event.


5. Ibid., p. xxiv.

6. Ms. N. 369, a letter from the president of the Natal Women's Suffrage League to N., 30 Dec. 1907, in which the writer drew a cogent contrast between Nathan's opposition to women's suffrage and his enthusiasm for electoral redistribution, in order to reform the gerrymander of the vote in favour of rural electors.


10. Ms. N. 149, H. Wolfe (Employment Department, Ministry of Labour) to N., 15 Nov. 1919, asking whether Nathan, as Mrs Blanco White's referee, ". . . could suggest any means of employing her, in some other Government Department or outside".
11. This and subsequent references are to Mss. N. 149-150, which contain Amber Blanco White's letters to Nathan, 1919-1930, and two drafts of replies by Nathan, one undated and the other marked "28 June 1930". Cf. Mrs Blanco White's version, recalled some fifty years after the event, in O'Brien, *Dublin Castle*, p.175: "She told the present author that she had met Nathan in some committee or other when she was in the Ministry of Labour and he in Pensions. He was a dear, charming, impressive-looking man, but a philanderer, a man who thought women existed to serve him; a bit of a humbug too, she thought, and not very sincere. He had talked to her about his past, his engineering feats, his colonial government experience, and about Ireland. From being 'the star of the Civil Service' he had been degraded but the many friends he had taken pains to cultivate rallied round and put him back in the firmament".


13. *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, pp.554-57. In his introduction (pp.22-23), Wells acknowledged Mrs Blanco White's assistance with this chapter, entitled "The Role of Women in the World's Work".


17. Nathan's official papers referring to these committees are in Mss. N. 494-95.

18. Ms. N. 516, Fiddes to N., 8 June 1920.

19. The relevant Colonial Office records for this period (C.O. 449/10, Governors' Pensions) contain no reference to Nathan, but his military obituarist (Edmunds, *Royal Engineers Journal*, 1939, p.40) asserted that the Queensland appointment was designed to allow Nathan a colonial pension; Sir Robert Hall, a friend of Nathan in later life and himself a governor of Sierra Leone in the 1950's, also believed that the Colonial Office was moved in this case by a spirit of benevolence (private communication, 7 July 1965). Lord Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1919 to 1921, was not among Nathan's personal acquaintances, though as Selborne's predecessor as High Commissioner in South Africa he probably knew of Nathan's work. Milner's biographer emphasizes his "concern for and loyalty to subordinates", a quality which might have made him sympathetic to the claim on the Colonial Office's patronage of an unemployed former governor; see A.M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964), p.584.

20. C.O. 418/193, Goold Adams to Milner, 26 Jan. 1920, outlines the Chief Justice's career, emphasizing his reputation for defying political directives.


22. See the minutes on C.O. 418/139, Lennon's despatches to Milner, March-Dec. 1920, forwarding bills for the swamping of the Council, price controls on the privately operated Brisbane Tramways and Mount Morgan copper mines, and especially the raising of rents on pastoral leases.

23. C.O. 418/139, minute by Lambert, 20 June, on Lennon to Milner, 20 March 1920, concerning the controversial Land Act Amendment Bill No. 1 of 1919-20 (known to its opponents as the "Repudiation Act" because it gave the government the unilateral power to raise pastoral rents ostensibly covered by contract).
27. See C.O. 418/193, Milner’s conciliatory letter to Theodore, 7 July, annexed to Lennon to Milner, telegram, 30 Sept. 1920.
31. Ms. N. 567, Nathan’s notes of an audience with the king, 12 Aug. 1920.
33. See Irwin Young, Theodore: His Life and Times (Sydney, 1971).
36. Duhig’s remark was reported in The Daily Mail, (London) 19 Aug. 1925, and Nathan’s appears in his letter to the king, 3 March 1922 (Ms. N. 529).
37. The Truth (Brisbane), 18 Feb. 1917 (J.D. O’Hagan Cutting Book No. 1, Queensland Public Library, Brisbane).
38. Charles Arrowsmith Bernays, Queensland—Our Seventh Political Decade, 1920-1930 (Sydney, 1931), p.288 and p.290. Though as chief parliamentary clerk in the 1920s Bernays was ostensibly non-partisan, in this and his earlier publication, Queensland Politics during Sixty (1859-1919) Years (Brisbane, n.d. [ca 1920]), Bernays betrayed a persistent anti-Labor prejudice.
40. Ms. N. 567, Nathan’s notes of interviews with Theodore, 3 March, and with William Cillies, 29 April 1921.
41. Ms. N. 500, Nathan’s notebook including an informal record of his official activities, 1 Aug. 1921.
42. Bernays, Queensland—Our Seventh Political Decade, pp.150-51.
43. See Bernays, Queensland—Our Seventh Political Decade, pp.235-82, and the paper presented to the twenty-eighth conference of ANZAAS (Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of the Arts and the Sciences), May, 1951, by A.A. Morrison, “The Abandonment of Bicameralism in Queensland”, a typescript copy of which is held by the Queensland Public Library. The most succinct legal and historical summary of the issues involved is in a minute by J.M. Green, 16 Jan. 1922, on C.O. 418/209, N. to Churchill, 21 Dec. 1921. There is a comparative treatment of the constitutional implications in Keith, Responsible Government in the Dominions, I, 555-67.
44. There is a reference to Theodore’s “undertaking” in the minute by Green, cited in note 43 above. Theodore had later made this promise public in an exchange of letters with A.B. Keith, an authority on dominions and colonial constitutions, printed in The Times, 28 May and 2 June 1920; there the Queensland prime minister declared his intention to postpone abolition until he had “a definite mandate from the people” for it, a phrase which Keith interpreted as a promise to conduct a referendum specifically on the question.
ENGLAND AND QUEENSLAND

53. Ms. N. 567, Nathan's notes of an off-the-record discussion with the Executive Council members, 2 Dec. 1921.
54. Ms. N. 531, N. to the Earl of Stradbroke, 18 Feb. 1923. The estimate of speech notes was no exaggeration; by the time he left Queensland, these filled six bound volumes (Mss. N. 538 and 570-74). Nor could Nathan be accused of neglecting the task of sending the Colonial Office "plenty of information"; in his first year in office his despatches (C.O.418/209) filled a complete volume, whereas in 1920 the combined production of Goold Adams and Lennon was only half as bulky.
55. See, for example, the minutes by Green, 21 March 1923, and 3 March 1924, on Nathan's massive "affairs reports" in these years (D.O. 532/233, 31 Jan. 1923, and 21 Jan. 1924).
57. *Brisbane Courier* editorials, 4 Sept. 1924 and 17 July 1925. The Tasmanian governor, vacant for almost three years, was subsequently filled by Sir James O'Grady, a Roman Catholic first suggested as a successor to Nathan (D.O. 532/233, Thomas to N., telegram, 29 July 1924).
58. See Ms. N. 567, Nathan's notes of an interview with Theodore in February, 1925, in which Nathan records his success in extracting from the prime minister a private admission that in the previous August he had urged Nathan to outstay his initial term.
60. Ms. N. 529, N. to the king, 3 March 1922, a letter fulfilling the promise he had given in his audience in 1920 to report unofficially on his impressions of Queensland.
61. Ms. N. 518, Theodore to N., 30 Aug. 1922, thanking Nathan for this "selfless" offer. The debate on the governor's allowances is in the Queensland *Hansard*, CXX-XVII (1921), 894-95.
62. Ms. N. 584 contains photographs of Nathan in Queensland, and Mss. N. 497-511 includes details of his extensive tours.
63. Ms. N. 574, typescript of Nathan's farewell speech, 16 Sept, 1925.
64. Mss. N. 517 and 523 contain Melba's letters to Nathan. The late Robert Nathan, a nephew of Sir Matthew, recounted an anecdote concerning Melba's remark that Nathan's resonant speaking voice was a loss to the grand opera stage.
66. *Hansard*, CXXXVII (1921), 895 (speech by Charles Collins, member for Bowen); C.O. 418/221, N. to Churchill, 30 April 1922, noting Collins's remark, in Nathan's "affairs report" for 1921.
68. Ms. N. 574, Nathan's notes of a speech at the official farewell dinner given by the Queensland government, 16 Sept. 1925.
70. Ms. N. 529, N. to the king, 3 March 1922.
71. Ms. N. 532, N. to a Mr Landeman, n.d. [ca Dec. 1924].
72. The visitors book for the West Coker manor house during Nathan's residence there, 1926-1939, is in the possession of his great-niece, Mrs Jean Longden, as are
his visitors books for the Government Houses and Under-Secretary's Lodge in the Gold Coast, Natal, Queensland and Ireland.

73. Postan to Edward Nathan, 28 Oct. 1948, Ms. Eng. hist. C.462, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The original typescript was bequeathed to the Royal Historical Society of Queensland in 1939 but cannot now be traced.

74. I am grateful to Lady Farrer, daughter of Lord Hanworth, a former Master of the Rolls, for information on this aspect of Nathan's activities and for a copy of a commemorative tribute to him by the Somerset Archaeological Society.

75. The papers for Nathan's work on public bodies in his last thirteen years of life are in Mss. N. 585-656, most of them annotated copies of committee proceedings and reports. For a brief summary of this period of Nathan's life, see Edward Nathan's foreword to The Annals of West Coker, pp. xx-xxii.
Among public servants as among all the sons of the Victorian middle classes whose private fortunes were inadequate to support a life of leisure, there were many who worked to live and a few who lived for work. A man of limited means by the standards of the class in which he was born, and of straitened circumstances by comparison with the circles to which he aspired, Matthew Nathan acquired from his mother an ambition to succeed which lifted him, with two of his five brothers and his step-brother Nathaniel, to the recognition of a knighthood for services to the state and a station in society a clear rung above that of their father, a Jewish businessman who, with the commercial co-religionists of his generation, had himself newly risen from the ranks of a despised minority in early Victorian England.

The most attentive of Miriam Nathan's sons, Matthew nevertheless moved beyond the limited horizons which she sought for her talented children by setting all of them who were capable of passing the qualifying examinations to a career in the respectable but circumscribed lower echelons of the army and the technical professions. Driven by an internal momentum derived from his desire to accumulate honours and promotion, Matthew Nathan would allow no obstacle to hinder his progress. The most striking illustration to his pursuit of a successful career was his determination to remain a bachelor. Though he found women attractive and a few of his many female friends reciprocated his attentions, he made an early decision to eschew the kind of retarding respectability which he attributed to
the burden of a wife and family, a handicap which temporarily diverted even such single-minded contemporaries as Frederick Lugard from the pursuit of his chosen career as an African colonial administrator. The remark of one of Nathan’s obituarists that he “never had the time” to marry was nearer the truth than its jocular tone implied. The prospect of a wife, like the accident of his Jewish birth, was a potential barrier to success. There were moments, as in Hong Kong and to a lesser extent in Natal, when Nathan recognized as a bachelor governor that his lack of a wife to share the burden of entertaining and mollifying the social climbers among the European population was in itself a disability; and Jewish residents were also capable of unintentionally embarrassing him by calling attention to his faith. In the Crown colonies as in Ireland, Nathan evaded these shoals by emphasizing his role as a working governor, and, in Natal and Queensland, by stressing his desire to promote “… the interests of all sections of the people”. Unable like Lugard to exploit the advantages of marriage to an influential wife and unwilling to allow himself to be represented as a symbol of the British Jews’ climb from the slough of social inferiority, Nathan set out on a sustained and successful campaign to obscure these two exceptional aspects of his private life. As a consequence, he emerged, as he fervently wished to be regarded, “a good public servant of the state”, typical of the qualities and limitations of a generation of British imperial officials.

That Nathan chose to depict his ambition in terms of “duty” and “service” illustrates the completeness with which he had ingested the ideals of the late Victorian middle class which he yearned to join. Summarized in his career motto, “never ask, never refuse”, this dedication to the twin objectives of service to the Empire and personal success lies at the heart of the self-effacing rhetoric with which Nathan and his contemporaries strove to sublimate their awareness that, unlike their predecessors, they lacked the spirit and opportunity for adventure which had created a vast network of what were still virtually unadministered overseas possessions. Bureaucrats rather than proconsuls, sedentary clerks rather than footloose visionaries, Nathan and the officials who shared his conviction that imperial and personal ambition tended towards the same ends were dependent for the achievement of their goal on the favours of Whitehall. Committed to a subservient attitude towards their London-based masters, chosen indeed because of their known or suspected capacity for unquestioning obedience and absolute discretion, these “governors” ran but did not rule the Empire. Nathan was in these terms among the most successful, because most promoted, of this generation.
“... seems to know everything”. While he never came to “know everyone”, Nathan obviously learned how to acquire with his Colonial Office superiors a reputation as a “first-rate” governor and how to recover from the loss of this reputation by cultivating useful connections ranking as high as the prime minister. Instructed by one of his earliest patrons, George Clarke, in the wisdom of associating with “the men who rule for the present”, Nathan was able to preserve for the public record an appearance of earning his rewards by faithful service, by never asking for and never refusing the offers of office made by appropriately appreciative superiors.

Even the most circumspect careerist needs some luck to succeed and Nathan’s good fortune is apparent in the timing of all but two of his postings. In Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Natal he arrived in the aftermath of serious rebellions; only in Ireland, spectacularly, and at the Pensions Ministry, in obscurity, did he face disgrace for his failure to anticipate the needs of his political masters. Even from Ireland, by far the most serious setback to his ambition, he emerged with the testimony of a Royal Commission to show that he had fulfilled, albeit to excess, his highest goal, the loyal observance of his superior’s policy. In the Gold Coast, where with the advantage of hindsight it may be concluded that Nathan’s opportunities for imaginative administration were greatest and his achievements least creditable, he so completely satisfied the Colonial Office’s insistence on parsimonious and pacific government that he was promoted at an exceptionally early age to the prized governorship of Hong Kong, carrying with him the knighthood which marked his triumph in combining self-interest and imperial service. Thereafter he openly departed from his career motto, “never ask, never refuse”, in only two actions: first, in failing to detect the changes taking place in the Empire and so declining the offer of a “second class” Nigerian governorship; and, at this same point of crisis in his career, calling overtly on political friends to secure the Post Office appointment. Fifteen years later, near the end of his public service, he was poised once again on the brink of turning down the offer of Ceylon when his gesture of self-sacrifice was lost on an ungrateful Colonial Office, which had chosen for that prized governorship the eminently professional Sir High Clifford.

Despite his loyalty to Colonial Office dictates, Nathan never succeeded in removing from his file the label “military governor”; when he and Clifford became long-distance rivals for Ceylon in 1924, each stood near the end of a career of almost identical duration but illustrating in its pattern of entry and promotion in the public service
which sought to rationalize through efficient administration the complexities thrown up by the growth of the regulatory state at home and the bewildering problems of an Empire acquired without reference to Britain’s ability either to govern or to exploit it.

This consolidation phase, some twenty-five years in duration and coinciding almost exactly with Nathan’s tenure of high office, demonstrated the limitations of British bureaucracy; regarded in Whitehall as needing “effective occupation” rather than development, the tropical territories which Nathan administered needed men of exceptional powers to meet the demands for imaginative administration implied in the rebellions of a few colonies and in the stubborn failure of the remainder to respond to the chimerical promise of imperial splendour when at last cooperation would be rewarded by the fruits of good order and a flourishing trade. As a peripatetic official, Nathan confronted in the tropics the problem of consolidation and, both in England and in the older colonies, the failure of Britain to patch up the facade of imperial unity. In his inability to recognize the failings of a credo which he had imbibed in mid-Victorian England, Nathan symbolized the limitations of a generation whose highest goal was to acquire or to preserve “respectability”, that quality which Britain continued to cherish as it became increasingly irrelevant to the nation’s role in a new and more challenging century.

Nathan’s career illustrates this dedication to decorum more clearly than that of most of his contemporaries because he set himself consciously to detect and to fulfil the unwritten criteria which distinguished the “good public servant of the state”. Neither by birth nor by training an automatic entrant to the public service, he had reached by the age of thirty a firm decision to subordinate his private life to the goal of promotion. By a combination of good fortune and the careful planning which is the sine qua non of a successful careerist, he reached his goal before he was forty and for the remainder of his life was satisfied to defend his station in the systematic manner which befitted a former secretary of the Colonial Defence Committee. Witnessing at close hand the tactical failure of mediocrities like Gore and Low, and the strategic inadequacies of abler men such as Cardew and McCallum, Nathan’s ear was generally alert to the faintest sounds of approval or censure in Whitehall. He never repeated the momentary and risky display of frustrated ambition with which he greeted the discovery in India that he was destined for faceless submergence in a military bureaucracy which apparently neither knew nor cared about the youthful Lieutenant Nathan who
the changing criteria for selecting senior officials. Clifford was an exemplar of the new breed, chosen by the competitive examination system which Nathan the outsider admired and hoped to see emulated in the African colonial service, still recruited, as he had been, by "patronage". Promoted from the Gold Coast, with its inefficient and "ungentlemanly" colonial officials, to Hong Kong, administered by specialists like the senior Francis May and such impressive younger men as Cecil Clementi, like May a later governor of that colony, Nathan was so impressed by professionals that he proposed both the introduction of a similar recruitment pattern in the Gold Coast and the creation of an "Eastern Colonial Service" for Hong Kong, Ceylon, the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, in imitation of the "heaven-born" Indian Civil Service officials towards whom he had felt so inferior and so envious when he came into contact with them as a junior army officer. But the professionals such as those whom he valued as efficient and loyal subordinates in Hong Kong were to brush aside amateurs like himself even before his career had run its natural course.

Clifford became a celebrated member of the professional group of colonial and home civil service officials who emerged in the consolidation phase of the Empire, many of them first serving as assistants to such survivors from the patronage-ridden past as Nathan. But Clifford was only four years younger than Nathan and in his youth had considered a military career, passing the entrance examination for the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, in the same year in which Nathan left Chatham as a lieutenant of the Royal Engineers. Apparently hedging his bets, Clifford also entered for the rigorous examination taken by aspirants to posts in the home civil service and the Indian and eastern colonies service; offered an eastern cadetship, he chose, or was chosen for, the Straits Settlements. The fact that his father's cousin, Sir Frederick Weld, was then governor of that colony suggests that Clifford had his eye firmly fixed on the likelihood that the Straits Settlements would offer him advantages not so readily available to a young man of his Roman Catholic up-bringing in the prestigious home and Indian services, though as a grandson of a baron he started several rungs above Nathan in social status. Taking up his colonial post in 1883, as Nathan was making his first acquaintance with the overseas territories as an assistant military engineer in Sierra Leone, Clifford rapidly acquired fluency in the Malay language and at the age of twenty-one he was chosen by Weld as the governor's emissary to the key Malay state of Pahang. With barely four years' experience, Clif-
ford employed his linguistic and diplomatic talents to good effect in extracting from the sultan an undertaking to sign a treaty with Britain. Appointed as the first agent in the Pahang capital, Clifford displayed some military prowess in helping the sultan to suppress a rebellion and was promoted to the rank of Resident, equivalent to a district officer in a colony when Pahang entered the Malay federation in 1895.3

Even with this youthful distinction in the field, Clifford could secure only the minor post of governor of North Borneo and Labuan in 1899, when Nathan made his first tentative step into the colonial service as acting governor of Sierra Leone. In 1901, when Nathan became a governor in his own right in the Gold Coast, Clifford returned to his old post in Pahang and for the next decade this point, counterpoint continued between the rapid rise of the newcomer and the slower advance of the professional. Nathan governed three “first class” colonies, so designated for purposes of governors’ pension qualifications in 1911,3 while Clifford followed the usual path for career officers through service as a colonial secretary, in Trinidad and Ceylon, arriving at the rank of governor in 1912 when he succeeded Sir John Rodger in the Gold Coast. In that colony Rodger had slowly reversed Nathan’s emphasis on pacification rather than development, and Clifford, the first undeniably professional governor of the Gold Coast, carried on the policy of encouraging road building and the growth of the cocoa industry until the first world war forced him to put a brake on government-financed development.

In the inter-war years when the Colonial Office was more alert to the possibilities of economic and administrative innovation and the corresponding need for governors of vision, Clifford had the right qualifications to join a trinity of administrators subsequently commended by an authority on their generation of professional colonial officials as “remarkable governors . . . who each demonstrated sharply their conviction of the paramountcy of native interests as they saw them”.4 As Clifford put it in his semi-fictional memoirs of his Malayan service, he had put in “... his apprenticeship on the outskirts of empire”5 at a time when continuous service began to count almost as a necessity for aspirants to governorships in the Crown colonies, and he was able to move on from the Gold Coast to Nigeria and thence to Ceylon, ending his career as governor of the Straits Settlements, thus sharing with Francis May and Cecil Clementi the satisfaction of returning loaded with honours to the colony in which he began his apprenticeship. Lacking the credentials to survive in the closed shop created by the guild of colonial specialists, Nathan found
no further job opportunities after Clifford edged him out for the Ceylon post and was obliged to retire on the pension for which Queensland qualified him. With a final irony, Nathan's failure to secure Ceylon caused him to be ineligible for an increase in pensions in 1928, raising from £1300 to £2000 a year the maximum amount payable to retired governors still in office in that year.

Even in retirement, the preoccupation of the two old colonial hands illustrated the deep chasm which lay between the attitudes towards the colonies of the professional and the outsider. While Nathan immersed himself in English local government and history, Clifford added to his already imposing list of publications on the language and culture of Malaya, the region which continued to dominate his interest. If Clifford's writings smack to modern taste of the narrow paternalism which characterized his various administrations in Africa and Asia, even the most cursory comparison between his romanticized recollections and the formal, frequently turgid, tone of Nathan's *Annals of West Coker* suggests a temperamental gulf between the two men which may account for the aloofness of Nathan's relationship with "the natives", as contrasted with Clifford's championing of the "paramountcy of native interests". A colleague has described Clifford as "neither by education nor by temperament ... inclined to political innovations" and Joseph Conrad, himself capable of caricaturing the colonial outposts in the interests of literary impact, damned one of Clifford's collections of Malayan tales as "... only truth ... simple and straightforward". Nevertheless, Clifford's descriptions of his experiences on the Malayan frontier border at times on the exuberant and betray momentary occasional signs of a genuine admiration for the indigenous cultures, contrasting not only with Nathan's gloomy judgement in Natal that the white man would be able to remain in Africa only as long as he was strong enough but with the general opinion of Nathan's generation of governors, ranging from Lugard's selective and idiosyncratic admiration of the nobler savages of the Nigerian north to the unabashed racism of Sir Charles Eliot in the British East Africa Protectorate, later to become a "white man's country" as a consequence of his energetic support of the settlers.

The most striking characteristic of Nathan's published writings, affirmed even in the more intimate of his personal papers, is his lack of engagement with people lower in the social hierarchy than himself. Notwithstanding his nephew's description of him as "liberal and un-Tory" in his views, which "... tended more than a little towards socialism", Nathan did not share Clifford's fascination
with the "lesser breeds" with whom his colonial service brought him in contact but not in touch. If he had nourished the nascent interest in colonial history hinted at in his early compilation of chronological lists for the Gold Coast and Natal, he would probably have imitated the impersonal and descriptive tone adopted by his former Colonial Office chief, Sir Charles Lucas, in his multi-volume *Historical Geography of the British Colonies*.

It was one of Nathan's strengths that he recognized the chronic limitations in his temperament, confessed in a letter to an importunate Cape Colony spinster anxious to enlist his aid in her mission to amalgamate two societies which, in both senses of the term, patronized the self-improvement of South Africa's under-educated working class; wearily Nathan replied: "...because I have the love of symmetrical organisation derived from a pedant's nature and a soldier's training, I will join with you in deploiring the existence of two central bodies directing the reading of South Africa". From this "pedant's nature" stemmed Nathan's zealous reorganization of the Gold Coast administration and his proposal for an Eastern Civil Service, both unobjectionable if not essentially imaginative ideas; but it also inspired his neglect of black aspirations in west Africa, his almost unconditional surrender to those of white settlers in Natal and Queensland and his insensitivity in Ireland to the inadequacies of a policy dictated by a regime not only out of sympathy but out of touch with its subjects.

A soldier's training might be sufficient as a preparation for the less demanding administrative burden of a governor and civil servant in the first quarter of this century, but for an assessment of the longer term implications of decisions reached on grounds of their mere tactical validity his Royal Engineer's expertise proved inadequate. As Nathan himself said of the training he had received at Chatham: "We are taught a few general principles ... but only learn by the misapplication of them in actual work". A natural consequence of Nathan's personal trial in Ireland was spectacular error. Accustomed by his Hong Kong and Natal experiences to the Colonial Office's system of priorities, in which the highest goal was defence of the status quo, Nathan set out, after the briefest display of initiative, to do as he was bidden and in the process became an unquestioning adherent of Birrell's sanguine faith in the capacity of the Irish parliamentary leaders to keep the extremists in check. In keeping with his conception of a civil servant's function, Nathan had his desk tidy and his files up to date when in Easter week he ran head on into a sub-culture whose existence he scarcely suspected, let alone understood.
Promoted beyond his powers, a far from uncommon experience in societies which prize order above insight, Nathan was a model administrator selected by an archaic system to control a people whose aspirations he might not have appreciated even if he had remained a self-conscious member of his own minority, and could never recognize once he had cast his lot with the British bureaucracy. The primary necessity if such a bureaucracy is to survive, and especially problematical when the society in which it exists is in a state of flux, is the placement of the right man in the right job at the right moment. In view of all these variables lying in wait for the unwary personnel officer, who in Nathan’s day was more likely to be called unashamedly a “patronage secretary”, the British public services at home and abroad came through the ordeal of accelerated growth and complexity at and soon after the turn of the twentieth century without lapsing into administrative chaos and at times producing some inspired appointments. But the inexorable progress—or the disastrous decline, as the more romantically inclined of Nathan’s contemporaries saw it—from the laissez-faire philosophy practised by the British government in the early nineteenth century to the “regulatory” state of his time, and the first stirrings of the welfare state implicit in his Pensions Ministry work, swelled the numbers and the proportion of the civil service who rejected his rationale of “duty” in favour of the motto satirized in Louis Macneice’s 1937 poem “Bagpipe Music”: “Sit on your arse for fifty years and hang your hat on a pension”.

In sympathy with the older rationale of noblesse oblige but unable to claim by right a membership of the coterie of university graduates and professional administrators who formed the civil service elite, Nathan yearned for the gentlemanly respectability which attached to service to the state. Whereas a century earlier he would have been faced at best with the choices available to the younger sons of the gentry, “to preach, fight or plead”, he found a gap in the rapidly closing barriers surrounding the civil services, through which even a young Jew, if he were talented in the acquisition of the social graces and a modicum of education, might still squeeze. About ten years too old to seize the opportunity for a university education available to his younger brother Robert, Matthew Nathan was among the last of the amateurs who skirted the prerequisites of a degree and examination entry to enter the higher ranks of the administrative services. In doing so, he became at a stroke a double anachronism: as a patronage appointee he symbolized a passing order of privilege on which by birth he had no automatic claim; and as one of the most
SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

successful products in his day of that "all-rounder" tradition which had complemented the patronage system he illustrated the inadequacies of amateur administration in a period when the Empire posed problems demanding specialist knowledge and a capacity for innovation. At neatly spaced intervals of ten years during the consolidation phase, Nathan three times received patronage appointments in the British colonial and home civil services and the fact that only his selection for the Post Office and Inland Revenue positions in 1910 and 1911 drew attention to him as one of the "best known cases" of privilege emphasizes the degree to which the colonial service lagged behind its home counterpart in the conscious reform of recruitment and promotion. But Nathan so completely met the criteria laid down by his superiors for satisfactory performance as a public servant that even in Natal and Ireland, the appointments most damaging to his reputation, he emerged with his loyalty unquestioned. Only once, when his "ungentlemanly" Labour superior John Hodge dismissed him from the Pensions Ministry for an excess of independence, was Nathan's obedience challenged, and his Colonial Office connections rescued him from that disgrace with a chance to qualify for a pension and honourable retirement.

No more than rhetoric when Nathan and his contemporaries were assured that the imperial government did not wish to rule the nation and the Empire from Whitehall, the pragmatic approach to decentralization and devolution made by Britain in the twentieth century could not begin to reflect reality until a generation of administrators emerged who were capable by training and temperament of giving a new meaning to the phrase "the man-on-the-spot". The norm of administrative subservience to London in the consolidation phase has been obscured by emphasis on the exploits of such aberrant individuals as Sir Frederick Lugard in Nigeria or even Sir Anthony MacDonnell in Ireland, both willing to take issue with their bureaucratic and political masters on questions of local expediency. In his hypersensitivity to the cable from "home" and the memorandum from above, Nathan was more representative of a generation, essentially amateur in background and dependent for promotion on satisfying their masters, which paradoxically but nevertheless persistently proved themselves more bureaucratic than the professionals.

While his highly personal "Irish troubles" left on Nathan's record the distinction he most feared, that of failing to keep his charges in order, his career was in complete harmony with the narrow conception of the empire, enunciated by his superiors, as a prestigious possession to be guarded. This caretaker mentality, in contrast with the
proconsular defiance of orders by his predecessors and the zealous pursuit of self-assigned roles as trustees by his professional successors, was Nathan’s most striking quality as an administrator. Lacking the gifts to match the gift of office, he remained content with his private plan of imperial defence, the consolidation of an inherited empire and the accumulation within it of non-hereditary honours.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Edmunds, Royal Engineers Journal, LIII (Sept., 1939), 40.
3. Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers (1911), IV, Pensions (Colonial Governors) Act, 1 Geo. 5, dividing the colonies into four classes, the Gold Coast, Hong Kong and Natal all being placed in Class I, and their governors who had completed ten years of service being awarded annual pensions at the rate of £5 per month. Nathan had served only a little over eight years in substantive governorships when he left Natal and therefore did not qualify for a governor’s pension until the end of his Queensland appointment.
4. Robinson, Dilemmas of Trusteeship, p.45. With Clifford, Robinson bracketed another professional, Sir Donald Cameron, and a former Royal Engineer, Sir Frederick Guggisberg, whose success in overcoming the career handicap of a military background is attributable not only to his personal qualities but to his long colonial service in the ranks, as a surveyor in the Gold Coast in a period which included Nathan’s governorship of the colony.
9. Ms. N. 368, N. to Miss Dora Fairbridge, president of the South African branch of the National Home Reading Union, 1 Aug, 1909.
11. An outstanding example was the selection to serve as secretary of the British Cabinet of Maurice Hankey, who first acted as secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, thus adding to the list of holders of that office and its earlier equivalent, the secretariatship of the Colonial Defence Committee, who went on to important civilian postings; see Stephen Roskill, Hankey: Man of Secrets (2 vols; London, 1970-72).
12. In singling out Nathan’s case, The Times, 21 Aug, 1912, drew on the Macdonnell Commission’s data on the home civil service to arrive at a figure of twenty-two “outside” appointments among 366 senior posts. Using slightly different criteria, R.K. Kelsall concluded that there were “not more than a dozen” such appointments among “some 435” senior civil servants in office in 1912; see his Higher Civil Servants in Britain from 1870 to the Present Day (London, 1955), p.106. Cf. the figures for “outsiders” appointed as colonial governors in the period 1899-1939, Chapter I, notes 72-73.
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262


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Index

Aborigines Rights Protection Society (Gold Coast), 77, 79–80, 82–84, 93; Cape Coast branch, 77, 82–84; Axim branch, 82–83
Accra, The Gold Coast, 58, 98n
Africa, West, 5, 12, 50, 51, 59
American Zulu Mission, 152
Amoaku, Kofi (Gold Coast), 76
Anderson, John, 102
Anglo-Jewish Association, 8, 109, 178
Ann Veronica, 111, 212, 213
Annals of West Coker, 21, 229, 230, 241
Antrobus, Reginald, 5, 6, 27–28, 41, 63, 91, 120
Army, British, 7; in Ireland, 187–89, 191, 201
Army, Indian, 16
Arthur, L. R. S., 63–64, 65
Ashanti, 54–55, 57–58, 59, 61, 62, 66, 67–68, 70–74, 87, 92, 93; Chief Commissioner, 74, 77; chiefs, 74–76, 83–84, 87, 88, 94n; economic policy, 70–72, 75, 83, 87, 88; Golden Stool, 58, 71, 73, 76–77, 84, 97; post-rebellion conditions in, 76. See also Gold Coast; Prempeh; Asantehene; Stewart, Donald
Asquith, Herbert, 3, 178, 179, 180–81, 182–83, 192, 201–2, 203, 208, 214–15
Asquith, Margot, 185
Asquith, Violet, 178–79, 195, 204
Athenaeum Club, 25
Attabubu (Gold Coast), 76
Auchinleck, W. L., 20
Australia, 131. See also Queensland
Awudua (Gold Coast), 76, 83
Babington Smith, H., 166
Balfour, Arthur, 23, 182–83
Bambata rebellion (Natal), 130, 131. See also Natal, martial law proclamation
Barnes, George, 209
Barrie, James, 203
Barry and Barry (railway engineers), 114
Basutoland. See Protectorates, South African
Bechuanaland. See Protectorates, South African
Bell, Hesketh, 226
Bernays, Charles, 224, 227, 232n
Blanco White, Amber, 207n, 211–13, 216, 230n, 231n
Blanco White, George Rivers, 212
Bloemfontein, 156
Blyden, Edward, 50–51

273
INDEX

Board of Inland Revenue. See Inland Revenue, Board of
Boer War, 14, 45, 53, 54, 154
Bombay, 16
Botha, Louis, 145, 149, 155, 156, 158, 160, 161
Boyle, Cavendish, 35n
Brandford Griffith, William (Gold Coast Chief Justice). See also Gold Coast, Chief Justice
Brandford, Griffith, William (Gold Coast governor), 88
Bridgeman, F. B., 152
Brisbane City Council, 227
Brisbane Courier, 111, 223, 227–28
British and Chinese Corporation, 110–12
Brooke, Rupert, 179
Brown, J. P., 84
Bryan, Herbert, 64
Buganda, 84
Buller, Redvers, 14–15
Bureh, Bai, 55n
Burma, 16–17
Burns, Alan, 226
Buxton, Sydney, 163, 177, 179
Calcutta, 17
Cambridge, Duke of, 23
Cameron, Donald, 226, 245n
Canton-Kowloon railway. See Hong Kong
Cape Coast, 49, 80–81, 82, 98n
Cape Colony, 131
Cape Town, 156, 158
Carnarvon, Earl of, 25, 153
Carson, Edward, 189
Carter, Thomas F., 135–39, 145, 147–48, 153
Casely Hayford, J. E., 80–81, 82, 84, 92
Caseyment, Roger, 193, 197
Ceylon, 3, 102, 103, 225–26, 229, 238, 239
Chalmers, David, 27, 37–38, 43, 45, 179
Chalmers, Mackenzie, 179
Chalmers, Robert, 175, 179, 203
Chamberlain, Neville, 187
Chancellor of the Exchequer. See Lloyd George, David
Chancellor, John, 33n
Chater, Paul, 109
Chatham. See School of Military Engineering
Chatham, William, 115
Chief Secretary of Ireland. See Birrell, Augustine; Ireland, administrative policy
Childer, Spencer, 14, 35n
China, 102, 106, 107; Hankow-Canton railway loan, 110–15; Hankow viceroy, 111, 112; Canton viceroy, 113
Cholmondeley, Mary, 19–20, 195
Church Missionary Society, 49–50, 51
Churchill, Winston, 128, 132, 134, 137–38, 140, 146, 166, 182, 223
Civil Service, British, 25, 163, 166, 174–76, 177, 199, 200, 208–10, 243; Royal Commission on, 175–76, 181, 203n, 204n, 245n; in Ireland, 182
Civil Service, Indian. See Indian Civil Service
Clarke, Andrew, 11–12, 14–15
Clarke, George Sydenham (Lord Sydenham of Combe), 12, 14, 15, 18, 22, 23, 24, 32n, 164, 176, 204n, 238
Clauson, John, 32n, 118
Clementi, Cecil, 239, 240
Clifford, Hugh, 3, 89, 93–94, 226, 238–42, 243–44, 245n
"Closer Union" movement (South Africa). See Natal, unification debate in
Cocoa. See Gold Coast economy policy
Colenso family (Natal). See Corenso,
INDEX

Harriette
Colenso, Harriette, 146

Colonial Defence Committee, 12, 15, 16, 22–24, 28, 34n, 53, 54, 90, 117–18, 176, 237, 245n


Colonial Service, British, 24–27, 29–30, 89–92, 102–3, 122n, 163, 175. See also Governors, British colonial

Committee of Imperial Defence, 22, 117–18, 164, 245n

Commons, House of, 175

Connolly, James, 200

Conrad, Joseph, 241

Cooper, Pope, 214, 220, 222

Cotton. See Gold Coast, economic policy

Creoles (Sierra Leone), 13–14, 27, 46–47, 49, 50, 52


Crimes Special Branches (Ireland). See Ireland, intelligence services in

Deane, W. A., 135

de la Rue, Thomas, 7

Devlin, Joseph, 190

Dillon, John, 187, 190–91, 193, 198

Dinizulu, 130, 131, 135–37, 147, 162–63. See also Natal, trial of

Dinizulu

Disraeli, Benjamin, 7

Dominions Office, British, 224–25

Dougherty, James, 181, 182

Drummond Wolff, Henry, 35n

Dube, John, 152

Dublin Castle. See Ireland, administrative policy

Dublin Metropolitan Police, 199, 200, 202, 206n

Duhig, James, 218–19

Duncan, Patrick, 156

Durban (Natal), 150, 151, 156, 157–58, 161, 162

Durnford, Arthur, 15

Egerton, Walter, 91

Egypt, 11, 14–15, 166

Elder, Dempster, 52, 56n

Elgin, Lord, 91, 118, 121, 130, 131, 132–33, 134, 137, 143, 146–47, 155, 173n, 179, 199

Eliot, Charles, 29, 152, 241

Eves, W. G., 114–15

Fabian Society, 211, 212

Faibir, Kuamina (Gold Coast), 76, 83

Fanti, 57

Fell, T. E., 64, 95n

Fiddes, George, 6, 111, 113, 115, 119, 120, 214

Fisher, H. A. L., 21

Fitzpatrick, Percy, 156, 157

Fitzgerald, Edward A., 64

France and Chinese railway concessions, 111. See also Russo-Japanese War

Foreign Office, British, 108, 111, 112

Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, 51

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 12, 32n, 48–49; Hill Station, 49; Improvement Ordinance (1899), 48–49

French Guinea. See Guinea, French

Friend, L. B., 187–88, 202

Freud, Sigmund, 8, 31n

Frontier Police, Sierra Leone, 42, 45, 46

Furse, Ralph, 34–35n

Gandhi, M. K., 149

George V, King, 215, 217–18, 226, 228

Ghana. See Gold Coast, The

Girouard, Edouard, 226

Give and Take, 213

Gold Coast, The, 52, 238; administrative policy, 62, 64–68, 79, 83–84, 93; Chief Justice, 78, 79, 92, 101n; chiefs, 74–76, 79, 80, 83–84; Colony, 58, 61, 67, 74–75, 79; economic policy, 59, 62, 64, 68–70, 79, 81–82, 85–90, education, 93; Executive Council, 62; health policy, 59, 65, 80–81,
INDEX

82–83; Legislative Council, 58, 79, 82, 83, 84, 92; "mortality" among Europeans, 59, 62, 95n; Protectorate, 57–58; Supreme Court, 58; transport policy, 85, 86–87, 89, 91–92. See also Aborigines Rights Protection Society; Ashanti; Northern Territories

Gold Coast Leader, The. See Casely Hayford, J. E.

Goldie, George, 39

Goold Adams, Henry, 214

Gordon, Charles, 14, 35n, 58

Gore, J. C., 27, 41, 63, 103


Grant, Robert (Inspector-General of Fortifications), 23, 25

Grey, George, 153

Griffith, Samuel, 214

Gubbins, C. O’Grady. See O’Grady Gubbins, C.

Guggisberg, Frederick, 79, 84, 89, 93, 99n, 245n

Guinea, French, 42, 51, 63

Haldane, Lord, 118

Hall, Robert, 231n

Hankey, Maurice, 245n

Hardie, Keir, 209

Hatton, Villiers, 108, 118–19

Hay, James, 50

Hayford, J. E. Casely. See Casely Hayford, J. E.

Hebron, Abraham, S., 48–49, 55n


Hennessy, John Pope. See Pope Hennessy, John

Heppell-Marr, Constance, 195–97, 212

Hitchins, Charles, 135

Hobhouse, Charles, 163, 177, 178, 190

Hodge, John, 209–10, 244

Hodgson, Frederic, 58–59, 61, 62–63, 73, 84, 88, 138

Holland, Bernard, 91

Home Civil Service. See Civil Service British

Home Office, British, 198


Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, 110

Hopwood, Frances, 132

Imperial British East Africa Company, 6

Imperialism, British, 2, 3, 89–92, 94, 215, 228, 236–37, 244

Imperialism, European, 1–2

Inanda. See American Zulu Mission

India, 14, 15–18, 166. See also Indian Office; Natal, Indians in

India Office, 149, 150–51, 163

Indian Civil Service, 17–18, 65, 239

Inland Revenue, Board of, 175, 176, 180–81, 203

Ireland, 3, 107, 238, 242; administrative policy, 182, 185, 188, 199; clandestine press in, 187–89, 190–91; Easter 1916 rising, 193–94, 198–200; Home Rule for, 180, 182, 184, 186, 192, 198, 206n; intelligence services in, 185, 186, 187, 193, 199–200, 206n; Irish parliamentary party, 180, 186–87, 189, 190–91, 192, 193; military conscription for, 192, 194, 201; Royal Commission on rising in, 179, 185, 188, 189, 192–93, 198, 199–201, 202. See also Birrell, Augustine; Dillon, John; Irish Volunteers; Redmond, John

Irish Republican Brotherhood, 199–200

Irish Volunteers, 190, 192, 194, 198, 199, 201, 207n
INDEX

Jabavu, J. T., 152
James, Henry, 19
Japan, 111. See also Russo-Japanese War
Jardine, Matheson and Company, 110
Jellicoe, E. G., 146
Jews, British, 3, 6–8, 25, 28, 31n, 89, 150, 177–78, 183, 235–36, 243
Jews, German, 8
Jews, Natal, 166, 173n
Jewish colony, proposed in east Africa, 166, 173n
Jones, Alfred, 52, 88
Jung, Carl, 9
Junk Bay (Hong Kong), 120
Just, H. W., 130, 133, 144, 168n
Kambia, Sierra Leone, 44
Karene, Sierra Leone, 44
Keith, Arthur Berriedale, 139, 223, 232n
Kidston, William, 221
Kildare Street Club (Dublin), 189
King-Harman, Charles, 53, 61
Kingsley, Mary, 19, 27, 37, 38–39, 41, 50, 51, 53, 81, 195, 229
King’s Park (Hong Kong). See Hong Kong, military land in
Kirby, Woodburn, 209
Kitchener, Lord, 188
Kowloon (Hong Kong), 106, 118–20
Kumasi, 57, 58
Kwangtung. See China
Lambert, Henry, 215
Larkin, Jim, 187
Labour, Ministry of, 212
Lennon, William, 214–15, 216, 221
Lewis, Samuel, 13, 47–48
Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. See Chambers of Commerce, British
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, 49, 80–81
Lloyd George, David, 176, 180–81, 182, 192, 203, 210
Logan Taylor, Dr M, 80–81
London School of Economics, 211
Long, Walter, 189
Lords, House of, 175, 176, 215
Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. See Ireland, administrative policy; Wimborne, Lord
Low, William, 62–63, 115
Lucas, Charles, 139, 158, 168n, 242
Lugard, Frederick, 2, 3, 5–6, 17, 29, 30, 36n, 58, 69–70, 73, 74, 75, 90–91, 94, 95n, 103–5, 106, 108, 110, 114, 115, 120–21, 130, 229, 236, 241, 244
Lushai expedition, 20
Lyons, Joseph, 225
Lyttelton, Alfred, 116
McCallum, Henry, 34n, 121, 122, 127, 130–31, 132, 133, 139, 142–43, 145, 152, 225
Macdonnell, Anthony, 182, 244
Macdonnell Commission. See Civil Service, British, Royal Commission on
Mackenzie, Duncan, 135
Macneice, Louis, 243
MacNeill, Eoin, 190, 199. See also Irish Volunteers
Maccabaeans, Society of, 8, 28
Madras, 163
Malaria. See Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
Malinke (Sierra Leone), 51
Mandingo. See Malinke
Marks, Shula, 167n, 172n, 173n
Mate Kole, Nana, 84
Maxwell, John, 201
Maxwell, William, 5, 30n, 84
May, Francis, 103, 106–7, 108, 110, 119, 121, 130, 131, 239, 240
Maydon, J. G., 161
Melba, Nellie, 227, 233n
Mende (Sierra Leone), 44, 47
Mensah Sarbah, John, 83, 99n
Merriman, John X, 157, 158, 160
Methuen, Lord, 165
Midleton, Lord, 189, 193
Mills, Dudley, 21–22
Milner, Lord, 2, 149, 152, 153, 214, 216, 231n
Missionaries, 50, 151–52. See also Church Missionary Society
Molteno, P. A., 128

277
Moor, Ralph, 67
Morrel, Edmund D., 20, 37–38, 77, 85, 88, 228
Morris, A. H., 72, 77–78
Moyamba, Sierra Leone, 44
Mozambique. See Transvaal, The, agreements with Mozambique
Natal Mercury, 138
Nathan, Edward, 33n, 210
Nathan, Estelle, 197
Nathan, Frederick, 31n
Nathan, George, 31n, 197
Nathan, Jonah, 6–9, 25, 31n, 32n, 164, 235
Nathan, Miriam, 7–9, 15, 18, 22, 31n, 121, 164, 165, 213, 235
Nathan, Nathaniel, 31n, 32n, 63, 235
Nathan, Robert, 9, 31n, 106, 243
Nathan, Walter, 31n
Nathan, William, 31n
Nathan Road (Hong Kong), 119, 125n
National Volunteers (Ireland), 190, 206n
New Territories, The (Hong Kong), 105–6, 110
New West End Synagogue, 22, 178
Nigeria, 58, 67, 74, 163
Noel, Garard, 117
Northcott, H. P., 72
Northern Territories, The (Gold Coast), 59, 62, 67, 68, 72–73, 77, 79; “chiefs”, 77–78, 97; Commissioner, 72, 77; economic policy, 72–73; “Fra-Fras”, 77–78, 97n. See also Ashanti; Gold Coast; Morris, A. H.; Northcott, H. P.; Watherston, A. E. G.
O’Broin, Leon, 205n
O’Grady, Gubbins, C., 135
Omaney, Montagu, 25, 105, 121
Orange River Colony, 134, 155, 159
Osuthu (Zululand), 131
Parkes, J. C. E., 43–44, 73
Patronage, system of recruitment. See Civil Service, British; Colonial Service, British
Pearse, P. H., 199–200, 202–3
Pember Reeves, Amber. See Blanco White, Amber
Pember Reeves, Magdalene, 211
Pember Reeves, William, 211
INDEX

Pensions Ministry, 208–10, 213, 238, 243; Special Grants Committee of, 210, 213
Peregrine, L. N., 65
Philip, Robert, 215, 216, 217
Pietermaritzburg (Natal), 161, 162, 165
Piggott, Lady, 109
Plunkett, Horace, 189
Ponsonby, Richard, 109
Pope Hennessy, John, 35n, 50, 106
Port Arthur, 117
Postan, M. M., 33n, 229
Postmaster-General. See Post Office, British
Post Office, British, 163–66, 175, 177–78, 238
Power, Eileen, 33n
Prempeh, Asantehene, 57, 58, 73, 93
Probyn, Leslie, 35n
Protectorates, South African, 160
Queensland, 3, 211; Australian Government for, 216, 224–25; British loans to, 220; constitutional issues in, 214–16, 219–27; Country Party in, 214; economic policy, 215, 220; Executive Council, 219, 224; Labor Party in, 214, 216–17, 219, 220, 221, 226, 227; Legislative Assembly, 219, 221, 223, 226; Legislative Council, 214–15, 220–22, 227, 232n; Nationalist Party in, 214; retirement of judges, 222; Roman Catholics in, 218, 228. See also Theodore, Edward

Railways. See China; Gold Coast; Hong Kong; Natal
Rangoon, 17
Rattray, R. S., 73, 94n
Redmond, John, 186, 190, 191, 192, 193
Regan, William, 77
Rhodesia, 160
Ridgeway, J. West, 34n, 102
Robinson, William, 119
Rodger, John, 35n, 87, 89, 93, 99n, 100n, 240
Ronietta, Sierra Leone, 44
Ross, C. H., 111
Ross, Dr Ronald, 49, 80
Rothschild, Lionel de, 7, 49
Rotifunk, Sierra Leone, 44
Rowe, Samuel, 13, 64
Royal African Society, 229
Royal Engineers, 9–11, 14–17, 22–23, 25, 26–27, 35n, 90, 181, 195, 203, 242
Royal Geographical Society, 229
Royal Irish Constabulary, 187, 206n
Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, 9–10, 32n
Rubber. See Gold Coast, economic policy
Russia and Chinese railway concessions, 111. See also Russo-Japanese War
Russo-Japanese War, 116–17, 119–20
Ryan, Thomas, 221
St Michael and St George, Order of, 24, 174
Salisbury, Lord, 23, 189
Samuel, Herbert, 177, 178, 179, 204n
Samuelson, R. C. A., 133–34, 162
Samuelson, S. O., 143, 144, 169n
Sarbah, John Mensah. See Mensah Sarbah, John
Satow, Ernest, 111–13
Saunders, Charles, 131–32, 143, 200
School of Military Engineering, Chatham, 10–11, 32n, 239, 242
Schreiner, W. P., 146–48
Seely, J. B., 175
Sekondi, 80, 82–83
Selborne Memorandum. See Selborne, Lord
Sey, J. W., 83
Shaw, Flora. See Lugard, Frederick
Shaw, George Bernard, 211, 212
Shepstone, A. J., 144
Shepstone, Theophilus, 131, 144
Sierra Leone, 12–14, 18, 27–28, 70; Protectorate rebellion (1898), 37–38, 41, 43–45; Executive Council, 52; Legislative Council,
INDEX

48–49, 52; Europeans in, 52; Moslem education, 50–51; "Secretary of Trade", 51–52
Silburn, P. A., 161
Simla, 17–18
Sinn Fein movement (Ireland). See Ireland
Smith, H. Babington. See Babington Smith, H.
Smythe ministry (Natal), 130, 132, 142
Somerset, 21, 229. See also West Coker (Somerset)
South Africa, Union of, 144, 151, 160. See also Natal, unification debate in
South African Customs Union, Statistical Bureau of, 154
Spry, Constance. See Heppell-Marr, Constance
State Department, United States. See United States
Sterndale, R. A., 34n
Stewart, Donald, 71, 73, 74, 76–77, 91, 93, 101n, 103, 108, 131, 143, 200
Stradbroke, Lord, 227–28
Strachey, Lytton, 117
Streatham, L. See Clarke, George Sydenham
Swaziland. See Protectorates, South African
Taft, William Howard, 116
Taiama, Sierra Leone, 44–45
Taylor, Dr M. Logan. See Logan Taylor, Dr M.
Temne (Sierra Leone), 13, 50
Thompson, Leonard, 172n
Times of Natal, The, 138
Togoland, 72
Tordoff, William, 94n
Trade, Board of, 212
Transvaal, The, 149, 155, 159, agreements with Mozambique, 154, 157–58, 161–62
Tucker, Madam, 44
Ulster, 189, 192
Under-Secretary of Ireland. See Ireland, administrative policy
Union of South Africa. See South Africa, Union of
Unionist Party, British; and Ireland, 189, 190, 192, 193
United States; and Ireland, 189; and Hankow-Canton railway concession, 111; and Chinese boycotts, 116, 124n
Victoria (Hong Kong), 106, 119
Vladivostok, 117
Volta, River, 87–88, 100n
War Office, British, 14, 22, 54, 119, 164, 176, 187–89, 192
Watherston, A. E. G., 72, 78, 98n, 99n
Watt, Thomas, 162
Webb, Beatrice, 211, 213, 216, 224
Webb, Sidney, 211, 212
Weld, Frederick, 239–40
Wells, H. G., 211–12
West African Regiment, 45, 47, 76
West Coker (Somerset), 164–65, 230; manor house, 164, 203; See also Annals of West Coker
West Indian Regiment, 18, 47
Whampoa, 110, 112, 114
White, Amber Blanco. See Blanco White, Amber
Willcocks, James, 59, 67, 76, 96n
Williams, Basil, 158
Wimborne, Lord, 185, 186, 193–94, 198, 201, 202
Wolff, Henry Drummond. See Drummond Wolff, Henry
Wolseley, General, 14
Woolwich. See Royal Military Academy
Wraith, R. E., 89
Yeats, W. B., 202
Yoko, Madam, 44
Zululand, 127–28, 131, 133, 135, 142–43, 151, 160

280