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9. Challenges to empire

The aim of this chapter is to describe the lives and achievements of some of the black people who lived in Britain between about 1830 and 1918. Some were born here; others, born in Africa, the West Indies, the United States, and India, made a permanent home here or stayed for months or years. They were active in politics, medicine, law, business, the theatre, music, dance, sport, journalism, local affairs. They included writers and men of God, orators and entertainers, two editors, a nurse, and a photographer. One, born in Chatham, was transported for life as a working-class rebel. Another, born in Liverpool, became mayor of Battersea. Another, born in Bombay, sat in the British House of Commons for three years as a Liberal MP. Two at least – the American actor Ira Aldridge and the London-born composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor – were artists of genius. What these people had in common gives this chapter its title. All of them, in one way or another, to some degree or other, challenged empire or – it came to much the same thing – challenged racism. A black person leading any kind of public life in Britain could hardly help doing so. Long before the First World War, Asians living in Britain were active in the cause of Indian freedom from British rule. And, by the turn of the century, Africans and persons of African descent living in Britain had done much to create the political tradition known as Pan-Africanism, whose challenge to imperialism would later inspire freedom movements all over Africa and the Caribbean.

William Cuffay

A little tailor called William Cuffay was one of the leaders and martyrs of the Chartist movement, the first mass political movement of the British working class. His grandfather was an African, sold into slavery on the island of St Kitts, where his father was born a slave. Like Davidson and Wedderburn before him, Cuffay was made to suffer for his political beliefs and activities. In 1848, Europe's year of revolutions, he was put on trial for levying war against Queen

Victoria. At the age of 61 he was transported for life to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania), where, after being pardoned in 1856, he spent the rest of his days active in radical causes.

William Cuffay was born in Chatham in 1788.¹ Soon after coming to Britain his father, who had evidently been freed, found work as a cook on a warship. William was brought up in Chatham with his mother and his sister Juliana. As a boy, though 'of a very delicate constitution' – his spine and shin bones were deformed – he 'took a great delight in all manly exercises'.² He became a journeyman tailor in his late teens and stayed in that trade all his life. He married three times but left no children.³

Though he disapproved of the owenite Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, formed in 1834 on the initiative of the London tailors, and was nearly the last to join the appropriate affiliated lodge, Cuffay came out on strike with his fellow-members. As a result he was sacked from a job he had held for many years, and found it very hard to get work afterwards. That was what took him into politics. In 1839 he joined the great movement in support of the People's Charter drawn up by the cabinet-maker William Lovett with the help of Francis Place, demanding universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, vote by secret ballot, payment of MPs, abolition of property qualifications for MPs, and equal electoral districts. It was a year when 'magistrates trembled and peaceful citizens felt that they were living on a social volcano'⁴ – a year when one noble general wrote to his brother: 'It looks as if the falling of an empire was beginning.'⁵ Before long Cuffay, the neat, mild-mannered black tailor, 4ft 11in. tall, had emerged as one of the dozen or so most prominent leaders of the Chartist movement in London. Unlike the movement's more celebrated national leaders, these were artisans, for Chartism in the capital was 'a sustained movement which produced its own leaders, stuck to its traditional radicalism yet worked out its own class attitudes'.⁶ In the autumn of 1839 Cuffay was helping to set up the Metropolitan Tailors' Charter Association – about 80 joined on the first night⁷ – and in 1841 the Westminster Chartists sent him to represent them on the Metropolitan Delegate Council. In February 1842 Cuffay chaired a 'Great Public Meeting of the Tailors', at which a national petition to the Commons was adopted.⁸ Later the same year the Metropolitan Delegate Council responded to the arrest of George Julian Harney and other national leaders by appointing Cuffay (as president) and three others to serve as an interim executive 'to supply the place of those whom a tyrannic Government has pounced upon'.⁹

For all his mildness of manner, Cuffay was a left-wing, militant Chartist from the beginning. He was in favour of heckling at meetings of the middle-class Complete Suffrage Movement and Anti-Corn Law League. His militancy earned him recognition in the press of the ruling class. *Punch* lampooned him savagely and *The Times* referred to London's Chartists as 'the Black man and his Party'; as a direct result of this press campaign his wife Mary Ann was sacked from her job as charwoman.¹⁰ In 1844 Cuffay was a member of the Masters and Servants Bill Demonstration Committee, opposing a measure which would have given magistrates power to imprison a neglectful worker for two months merely on his employer's oath. The radical MP Thomas Slingsby Duncombe was chief parliamentary opponent of what he called 'one of the most insidious, oppressive, arbitrary, iniquitous, and tyrannical attempts to oppress the working classes that had ever been made',¹¹ and Cuffay was the tailors' delegate at meetings to arrange a soirée for Duncombe. A strong supporter of Feargus O'Connor's Chartist land scheme – the idea was to take the unemployed out of the slums and give each family two acres of good arable land – Cuffay moved the resolution at the Chartists' 1845 national convention 'that the Conference now draw up a plan to enable the people to purchase land and place the surplus labourers who subscribe thereto on such land'.¹² In 1846 he was one of London's three delegates to the Birmingham land conference, and he and another London tailor, James Knight, were appointed auditors to the National Land Company, which soon had 600 branches all over the country.¹³ In the same year Cuffay served as one of the National Anti-Militia Association's ten directors and was a member of the Democratic Committee for Poland's Regeneration, of which Ernest Jones, friend of Marx and Engels, was president. In 1847 he was on the Central Registration and Election Committee, and in 1848 he was on the management committee for a Metropolitan Democratic Hall.*

For Cuffay, as for so many other working people in western Europe, 1848 was 'the year of decision'.¹⁵ He was one of the three

* William Cuffay was by no means the only black man who played an active part in the London Chartist movement. Two of the leaders of a demonstration in Camberwell on 13 March 1848 were 'men of colour': David Anthony Duffy (or Duffey), a 21-year-old out-of-work seaman, described as 'a determined looking and powerful fellow' and known to the police as a beggar in the Mint, where he was said to go about 'without shirt, shoe, or stocking'; and another seaman, an 'active fellow' called Benjamin Prophitt (or Prophet), known as 'Black Ben', aged 29. Duffy was transported for seven years, Prophitt for fourteen.¹⁴

London delegates to the Chartists' national convention that met in the April. From the start of the proceedings he made his left-wing position plain. Derby had sent as delegate a sensational journalist and novelist called George Reynolds – he gave his name to what eventually became *Reynolds News* – and Cuffay challenged the middle-class newcomer, demanding to know if he really was a Chartist. Cuffay also at first opposed the granting of credentials to Charles M'Carthy of the Irish Democratic Federation, but the dispute was settled, and M'Carthy admitted, by a sub-committee of which Cuffay was a member. The convention's main task was to prepare a mass meeting on Kennington Common and a procession that was to accompany the Chartist petition, bearing almost two million signatures, to the Commons. When Reynolds moved an amendment declaring 'That in the event of the rejection of the Petition, the Convention should declare its sitting permanent, and should declare the Charter the law of the land', Cuffay said he was opposed to a body declaring itself permanent that represented only a fraction of the people: he was elected by only 2,000 out of the two million inhabitants of London. He moved that the convention should confine itself to presenting the petition, and that a national assembly be called – 'then come what might, it should declare its sittings permanent, and go on, come weal or come woe'.¹⁶ At length the idea of a national assembly was accepted. In a later debate Cuffay told his fellow delegates that 'the men of London were up to the mark, and were eager for the fray'. In a speech sharply critical of the national leadership, he declared that the Irish patriots ('confederates')

were also in an advanced state of preparation, and if a spark were laid to the train in Ireland, they would not wait for Chartists. A deputation from the two bodies met together on Monday night last, and the result was, that the confederates were ready to march in procession with them under the green flag of Erin (cheers). The trades were also coming out, and amongst the rest the tailors, to which he belonged (a laugh). Well, if they did not get what they wanted before a fortnight, he, for one, was ready to fall; and if the petition was rejected with scorn, he would move at once to form a rifle club (cheers) . . . He did think that their leader Feargus [O'Connor] was not quite up to the mark, and he suspected one or two more of the executive council strongly; and if he found that his suspicions were correct, he would move to have

them turned out of office (laughter and cheers). The country had no right to despair of the men of London . . . There were only 5,000 soldiers in London.¹⁷

When a moderate speech was made, Cuffay burst out: 'This clapping of hands is all very fine, but will you fight for it?' There were cries of 'Yes, yes' and cheers.¹⁸

Appointed chairman of the committee for managing the procession, Cuffay was responsible for making sure that 'everything . . . necessary for conducting an immense procession with order and regularity had been adopted', and suggested that stewards wear tricolour sashes and rosettes. Things had now come to a crisis, he said, and they must be prepared to act with coolness and determination. It was clear that the executive had shrunk from their responsibility. They did not show the spirit they ought. He no longer had any confidence in them, and he hoped the convention would be prepared to take the responsibility out of their hands and lead the people on themselves.¹⁹ At the final meeting, on the morning of the demonstration, Cuffay opposed endless debate. 'The time is now come for work', he insisted. An observer recorded that, as the convention broke up and delegates took their places on the vehicles carrying the petition, Cuffay 'appeared perfectly happy and elated' for the first time since the proceedings opened.²⁰

The commissioner of police had declared that the proposed procession was illegal. The queen had been packed off to the Isle of Wight for her safety, and the royal carriages and horses and other valuables had been removed from the palace. Tens of thousands of lawyers, shopkeepers, and government clerks had been enrolled as special constables. All government buildings were prepared for attack: at the Foreign Office, the ground-floor windows were blocked with bound volumes of *The Times*, thought to be thick enough to stop bullets, and the clerks were issued with brand-new service muskets and ball cartridges. The British Museum was provided with 50 muskets and 100 cutlasses. The Bank of England was protected with sandbags. Along the Embankment, 7,000 soldiers were distributed at strategic points. Heavy gun batteries were brought up from Woolwich. The bridges were sealed off and guarded by over 4,000 police. O'Connor was interviewed by the commissioner of police – who said afterwards that he had never seen a man so frightened – and decided to call off the procession.

When the crowd at Kennington Common heard this, many of them were very angry. There were shouts that the petition should

have been carried forward until actively opposed by the troops and then withdrawn altogether on the ground that such opposition was unlawful. One of the protesters was Cuffay, who

spoke in strong language against the dispersal of the meeting, and contended that it would be time enough to evince their fear of the military when they met them face to face! He believed the whole Convention were a set of cowardly humbugs, and he would have nothing more to do with them. He then left the van, and got among the crowd, where he said that O'Connor must have known all this before, and that he ought to have informed them of it, so that they might have conveyed the petition at once to the House of Commons, without crossing the bridges. They had been completely caught in a trap.²¹

Cuffay was elected as one of the commissioners to promote the campaign for the Charter after its rejection by Parliament. As with Davidson and Wedderburn, however, most of our scanty information about his activities comes from police spies, one of whom was actually a member of the seven-strong 'Ulterior Committee' that was planning an uprising in London. Cuffay was certainly a late, and almost certainly a reluctant, member of this body. On 16 August 1848, 11 'luminaries', allegedly plotting to fire certain buildings as a signal for the rising, were arrested at a Bloomsbury tavern, the Orange Tree, near Red Lion Square. Cuffay was arrested later at his lodgings. He had not been a delegate to the committee for more than 12 days, and had not been elected secretary until 13 August.²² So he was certainly not, as *The Times* called him, 'the very chief of the conspiracy'.²³ Indeed it is claimed that, before the police swooped, he had realized that the plan was premature and hopeless but, from solidarity, had refused to back out.²⁴ He could have gone underground, but he chose not to: he 'refused to fly, lest it should be said that he abandoned his associates in the hour of peril'.²⁵

'CUFFEY', sneered *The Times*, ' . . . is half a "nigger"'. Some of the others are Irishmen. We doubt if there are half-a-dozen Englishmen in the whole lot.²⁶ Cuffay's bearing in court soon wiped the smirk off the face of *The Times*. He pleaded not guilty in a loud voice and objected to being tried by a middle-class jury. 'I demand a fair trial by my peers,' he said, 'according to the principles of Magna Charta.' Then the prospective jurors were challenged, and one,

asked if he had ever expressed an opinion as to Cuffay's guilt or innocence, or what ought to be the result of the trial, replied: 'Yes, I have expressed an opinion that they ought all to be hanged.' He was told to retire, 'and after considerable delay a jury was at length formed'. Though counsel for the boot cleaver Thomas Fay and the bootmaker William Lacey – two Chartists who stood in the dock with Cuffay – said his clients were satisfied, Cuffay made it clear that he himself was not. 'I wish it to be understood', he exclaimed, 'that I do object to this jury. They are not my equals – I am only a journeyman mechanic.'²⁷

Cuffay's conviction for levying war on the queen was obtained through the evidence of two police spies. One, Thomas Powell, widely known as 'Lying Tom', said in cross-examination that he had told the Chartists how to make grenades: 'I told them that gunpowder must be put into an ink-bottle with an explosive cap, and I dare say I did say that it would be a capital thing to throw among the police if it had some nails in it.'²⁸ The other spy, George Davis, a second-hand book and furniture dealer from Greenwich and a member of the Chartists' 'Wat Tyler brigade' there, told how he had attended its meetings and 'reported within two hours all that had occurred at each meeting to the inspector of police'. For the past few weeks the people of Greenwich had suspected him of being a spy, and he had lost his trade as a result.²⁹ The Metropolitan Police had paid Powell £1 per week, Davis a lump sum of £150, and had also bought information from at least two other Chartists.³⁰

In his defiant final speech Cuffay denied the court's right to sentence him. He had not been tried by his equals, and the press had tried to smother him with ridicule. He asked neither pity nor mercy; he had expected to be convicted. He pitied the attorney-general – who ought to be called the spymaster-general – for using such base characters to get him convicted. The government could only exist with the support of a regular organized system of police espionage. Cuffay declared his total innocence of the charge: his locality never sent any delegates, and he had nothing to do with the 'luminaries'. He was not anxious for martyrdom, but he felt that he could bear any punishment proudly, even to the scaffold. He was proud to be among the first victims of the Act of Parliament making the new political crime of 'felony' punishable by transportation. Every proposal that was likely to benefit the working classes had been thrown out or set aside in Parliament, but a measure to restrain their liberties had been passed in a few hours. (For the full text of Cuffay's speech from the dock, see appendix D, pp. 407–9.)

Cuffay and his two comrades were sentenced to transportation 'for the term of your natural lives'. 'A severe sentence, but a most just one', commented *The Times*.³¹ The radical press praised the tailor's steadfastness and courage. The *Northern Star*, most influential of Chartist newspapers, said:

The conduct of CUFFAY throughout his trial was that of a *man*. A somewhat singular appearance, certain eccentricities of manner, and a habit of unregulated speech, afforded an opportunity to the 'suckmug' reporters, unprincipled editors, and buffoons of the press to make him the subject of their ridicule. The 'fast men' of the press . . . did their best to smother their victim beneath the weight of their heavy wit . . . In a great measure, CUFFAY owes his destruction to the Press-gang. But his manly and admirable conduct on his trial affords his enemies no opportunity either to sneer at or abuse him . . . His protest from first to last against the mockery of being tried by a jury animated by class-resentments and party-hatred, showed him to be a much better respecter of 'the constitution' than either the Attorney General or the Judges on the bench. CUFFAY's last words should be treasured up by the people.³²

The author of 'A word in defence of Cuffey' in the *Reasoner* had this to say:

When hundreds of working men elected this man to audit the accounts of their benefit society, they did so in the full belief of his trustworthiness, and he never gave them reason to repent of their choice.

Cuffey's sobriety and ever active spirit marked him for a very useful man; he cheerfully fulfilled the arduous duties which devolved upon him.

And the *Reasoner* added: 'He was a clever, industrious, honest, sober, and frugal man.'³³ A profile of Cuffay in *Reynolds's Political Instructor* said he was

loved by his own order, who knew him and appreciated his virtues, ridiculed and denounced by a press that knew him not, and had no sympathy with his class, and banished by a government that feared him . . . Whilst integrity in the midst of poverty, whilst honour in the midst of temptation are

admired and venerated, so long will the name of William Cuffay, a scion of Afric's oppressed race, be preserved from oblivion.³⁴

After a voyage lasting 103 days on the prison ship *Adelaide*, Cuffay landed in Tasmania in November 1849. He was permitted to work at his trade for wages – which he did until the last year of his life – and after much delay his wife was allowed to join him in April 1853.³⁵ Cuffay was unique among veteran Chartists in exile in that he continued his radical activities after his free pardon on 19 May 1856. In particular, he was active in the successful agitation for the amendment of the colony's Masters and Servants Act. He was described as 'a fluent and an effective speaker', who was 'always popular with the working classes' and who 'took a prominent part in election matters, and went in strongly for the individual rights of working men'. At one of his last public appearances he called his working-class audience 'Fellow-slaves' and told them: 'I'm old, I'm poor, I'm out of work, and I'm in debt, and therefore I have cause to complain.'³⁶

In October 1869 Cuffay was admitted to Tasmania's workhouse, the Brickfields invalid depot, in whose sick ward he died in July 1870, aged 82. The superintendent described him as 'a quiet man, and an inveterate reader'. His grave was specially marked 'in case friendly sympathisers should hereafter desire to place a memorial stone on the spot'.³⁷

Cuffay makes fleeting appearances in three mid-nineteenth-century works of literature. Thackeray, in 'The Three Christmas Waits' (1848), poked fun at him as 'the bold CUFFEE' and 'A pore old blackymore rogue'.³⁸ A character in Charles Kingsley's novel *Alton Locke, tailor and poet* (1850) praises Cuffay's 'earnestness'; in the same novel the police spy Powell is described as a 'shameless wretch' and Cuffay is patronizingly called 'the honestest, if not the wisest, speaker' at Kennington Common.³⁹

A fuller, more faithful portrait was painted by Cuffay's friend, admirer, and fellow-Chartist Thomas Martin Wheeler, whose semi-autobiographical 'Sunshine and Shadow' was serialized in the *Northern Star* in 1849. Wheeler recalled how, at a Chartist meeting in the early 1840s, he first

gazed with unfeigned admiration upon the high intellectual forehead and animated features of this diminutive Son of Africa's despised and injured race. Though the son of a West Indian and the grandson of an African slave, he spoke the

English tongue pure and grammatical, and with a degree of ease and facility which would shame many who boast of the purity of their Saxon or Norman descent. Possessed of attainments superior to the majority of working men, he had filled, with honour, the highest offices of his trade society . . . In the hour of danger no man could be more depended on than William Cuffay – a strict disciplinarian, and a lover of order – he was firm in the discharge of his duty, even to obstinacy; yet in his social circle no man was more polite, good-humoured, and affable, which caused his company to be much admired and earnestly sought for – honoured and respected by all who knew him . . . Yes, Cuffay, should these lines ever meet thine eyes in thy far-distant home, yes, my friend, though thou hast fallen – thou hast fallen with the great and noble of the earth . . . Faint not, mine old companion, the darkness of the present time will but render more intense the glowing light of the future.⁴⁰

Mary Seacole

A challenge to empire of a very different kind was that of Mary Seacole, the Jamaican nurse whose reputation just after the Crimean War (1853–6) rivalled Florence Nightingale's. Mary Seacole's challenge, quite simply, was to have her skills put to proper use in spite of her being black. A born healer and a woman of driving energy, she side-stepped official indifference, hauteur, and prejudice; got herself out to the war front by her own efforts and at her own expense; risked her life to bring comfort to wounded and dying soldiers; and became the first black woman to make her mark in British public life. But while Florence Nightingale was turned into a legend in the service of empire, Mary Seacole was soon relegated to an obscurity from which she has only recently been rescued, by Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee.¹

Mary Seacole was born in Kingston around the year 1805. Her father was a Scottish soldier possibly called Grant;² her mother, a competent practitioner of Jamaican traditional medicine, kept a boarding-house where she cared for invalid officers and their wives.³ From early youth, Mary had 'a yearning for medical knowledge and practice'; at first she practised on her doll and on cats and dogs, but in due course she was helping her mother look after the invalid officers.⁴ She soaked up knowledge from her mother, soon gaining a reputation as 'a skilful nurse and doctress'.⁵

Both before and after her marriage to Horatio Seacole, who died young, she travelled widely. There were two trips to Britain, where London street-urchins jeered at her. In 1851, during the California gold rush, she joined her brother Edward in Panama, where she opened an hotel. Soon she had saved her first cholera patient and had gained valuable knowledge from a post-mortem examination of an orphan baby that had died of this disease – which she herself contracted and recovered from. A white American who toasted her, as ‘Auntie Seacole’, for her work in the cholera epidemic, ventured to suggest that she be bleached in order to make her ‘as acceptable in any company as she deserves to be’. Mary Seacole replied stinginglly:

I must say that I don't altogether appreciate your friend's kind wishes with respect to my complexion. If it had been as dark as any nigger's, I should have been just as happy and as useful, and as much respected by those whose respect I value; and as to his offer of bleaching me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without any thanks. As to the society which the process might gain me admission into, all I can say is, that, judging from the specimens I have met with here and elsewhere, I don't think that I shall lose much by being excluded from it. So, gentlemen, I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners.⁶

When she returned to Jamaica in 1853 her house was filled with victims of the yellow-fever epidemic. One man died in her arms, and the medical authorities asked her to provide nurses for the stricken soldiers.⁷ The following autumn found her in London, where news was beginning to come through of the collapse of the British army's nursing system in the Crimea and the agonies, heightened by gross mismanagement, of the sick and wounded. Feeling that her skills and experience could and should be put to good use, Mary Seacole applied in turn to the War Office, the army medical department, the quartermaster-general's department, and the secretary for war. She produced fine testimonials and pointed out that she already knew many of the officers and soldiers in the regiments concerned, having nursed them when they were stationed in Jamaica.

But authority closed ranks against this plump, middle-aged West Indian lady in her flamboyant red or yellow dress and blue straw bonnet from which flowed a length of scarlet ribbon. She was turned away by everybody – including one of Florence Night-

ingale's assistants, in whose face she read 'the fact, that had there been a vacancy, I should not have been chosen to fill it'. Was it possible, she asked herself, 'that American prejudices against colour had some root here? Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs?'⁸ And, in her disappointment, Mary Seacole wept in the street.

A distant relative, a man called Day, was going to Balaklava on business. They came to an agreement to launch a firm called Seacole and Day, and to open, as a joint enterprise, a store and an hotel near the British camp in the Crimea. So, taking with her a large stock of medicines and home comforts, Mary Seacole, at the age of 50, went out to the battle zone as a sutler – i.e. one who follows an army and sells provisions to the troops. Skill, experience, and personality together made her the right woman in the right place at the right time.

Hardly had she landed at Balaklava when a party of sick and wounded arrived on the wharf. Here was work for her to do:

So strong was the old impulse within me, that I waited for no permission, but seeing a poor infantryman stretched upon a pallet, groaning heavily, I ran up to him at once, and eased the stiff dressings. Lightly my practised fingers ran over the familiar work, and well was I rewarded when the poor fellow's groans subsided into a restless uneasy mutter . . . He had been hit in the forehead, and I think his sight was gone. I stooped down, and raised some tea to his baked lips . . . Then his hand touched mine, and rested there, and I heard him mutter indistinctly, as though the discovery had arrested his wandering senses –

'Ha! this is surely a woman's hand.' . . .

He continued to hold my hand in his feeble grasp, and whisper 'God bless you, *woman* – whoever you are, God bless you!' – over and over again.⁹

Mary Seacole's British Hotel opened its doors in the early summer of 1855 at Spring Hill near Kadikoi, 'a small town of huts'¹⁰ between Balaklava and the besieged city of Sevastopol. It was built from floating wreckage, for virtually all the trees in the area had long since been cut down. Soon almost the entire British army knew of 'Mother Seacole's', where 'you might get everything . . . from an anchor down to a needle'.¹¹ The soldiers were her 'sons' and she

was their 'mother'. At the sound of a new arrival, she would come to the door, crying: 'Who is my new son?' That was how she greeted the head chef of London's Reform Club, Alexis Soyer, who revolutionized army cooking methods during his visit to the Crimea. He describes her as 'an old dame of jovial appearance, but a few shades darker than the white lily'.¹²

A lieutenant in the 63rd (West Suffolk) Regiment wrote in his memoirs:

She was a wonderful woman . . . All the men swore by her, and in case of any malady would seek her advice and use her herbal medicines, in preference to reporting themselves to their own doctors. That she did effect some cures is beyond doubt, and her never failing presence among the wounded after a battle and assisting them made her beloved by the rank and file of the whole army.¹³

Another account of her 'store-dispensary-hospital' claims that

She had the secret of a recipe for cholera and dysentery; and liberally dispensed the specific, alike to those who could pay and those who could not. It was bestowed with an amount of personal kindness which, though not an item of the original prescription, she evidently deemed essential to the cure, and innumerable sufferers had cause to be grateful.¹⁴

Though some of the army doctors, despite her saving them a lot of work, may well have looked on her as 'a cunning and resourceful quack',¹⁵ others were less bigoted. The assistant surgeon of the 90th Light Infantry saw her on the Balaklava landing-stage, serving hot tea to the wounded as, numb with cold in a temperature well below freezing-point and exhausted by the long journey from the front, they waited to be lifted into the boats:

She did not spare herself . . . In rain and snow, in storm and tempest, day after day she was at her self-chosen post, with her stove and kettle, in any shelter she could find, brewing tea for all who wanted it, and they were many. Sometimes more than 200 sick would be embarked in one day, but Mrs. Seacole was always equal to the occasion.¹⁶

Mary Seacole was generally up and busy by daybreak, serving breakfast to off-duty troops, caring for the sick and wounded able to make their own way to her hut, visiting the military hospital with

books and papers, mending torn uniforms. Rats and thieves gave her much trouble: she lost over 20 horses, 4 mules, 80 goats, and numerous sheep, pigs, and poultry. Frequently she was under fire, and she was so overweight that she found it easier to take cover than to rise to her feet again when the danger had passed:

Those around would cry out, 'Lie down, mother, lie down!' and with very undignified and unladylike haste I had to embrace the earth, and remain there until the same voices would laughingly assure me that the danger was over, or one more thoughtful than the rest, would come to give me a helping hand, and hope that the old lady was neither hit nor frightened.¹⁷

It was W.H. Russell, the first modern war correspondent – and the last war correspondent to be free from military censorship – who made Mary Seacole famous in Britain. This 'kind and successful physician', he wrote in a dispatch dated 14 September 1855, 'doctors and cures all manner of men with extraordinary success. She is always in attendance near the battle-field to aid the wounded, and has earned many a poor fellow's blessings'.¹⁸ He added later:

I have seen her go down under fire with her little store of creature comforts for our wounded men, and a more tender or skilful hand about a wound or a broken limb could not be found among our best surgeons. I saw her at the assaults on the Redan, at the Battle of the Tchernaya, at the fall of Sebastopol, laden . . . with wine, bandages and food for the wounded or the prisoners. Her hands, too, performed the last offices for some of the noblest of our slain. Her hut was surrounded every morning by the rough navvies and Land Transport men, who had a faith in her proficiency in the healing art, which she justified by many cures and by removing obstinate cases of diarrhoea, dysentery, and similar camp maladies.¹⁹

She was, as she had vowed to be, the first woman to enter Sevastopol when it fell. But the end of the war left the firm of Seacole and Day with expensive and now unsalable stores on their hands. They were forced into bankruptcy, and Mary Seacole returned to England, 'ruined in fortune and injured in health' to live at 1 Tavistock Street, Covent Garden.²⁰ There was talk of her setting up a pro-

vision store at Aldershot, but this scheme evidently fell through, for a letter in *The Times* was soon demanding:

Where are the Crimeans? Have a few months erased from their memories those many acts of comforting kindness which made the name of the old mother venerated throughout the camp? While the benevolent deeds of Florence Nightingale are being handed down to posterity . . . are the humbler actions of Mrs. Seacole to be entirely forgotten . . . ?²¹

Punch published an appeal on her behalf, entitled 'A stir for Seacole':

That berry-brown face, with a kind heart's trace
Impressed in each wrinkle sly
Was a sight to behold, though the snow-clouds rolled
Across that iron sky.

The cold without gave a zest, no doubt,
To the welcome warmth within:
But her smile, good old soul, lent heat to the coal,
And power to the pannikin.

No store she set by the epaulette,
Be it worsted or gold-lace;
For K.C.B., or plain private SMITH
She still had one pleasant face . . .

The sick and sorry can tell the story
Of her nursing and dosing deeds.
Regimental M.D. never worked as she
In helping sick men's needs . . .

And now the good soul is 'in the hole',
What red-coat in all the land,
But to set her upon her legs again
Will not lend a willing hand?²²

Lord Rokeby, who had commanded a British division in the Crimea, joined with Lord George Paget, another Crimea commander, and others to arrange for her benefit a gigantic four-day musical festival at the Royal Surrey Gardens in Kennington. There were

almost 1,000 performers, including nine military bands and an orchestra, and Mary Seacole sat between Rokeby and Paget in the front of the centre gallery. At the end of both parts of the programme her name was 'shouted by a thousand voices' and 'the genial old lady rose from her place and smiled benignantly on the assembled multitude, amid a tremendous and continued cheering'. 'Never', wrote a reporter, 'did woman seem happier.'²³ Unfortunately, though the admission charge was quintupled for the first performance, the festival raised only £228. At an official dinner in honour of the Guards, Mary Seacole was 'cheered, and chaired, . . . by the adoring soldiers', receiving, it is claimed, 'the reception that Florence Nightingale would have had, had she not studiously avoided it'.²⁴ In 1857 Mary Seacole published her autobiography, an outstandingly vivid piece of writing: the 'as-told-to' narrative is so skilfully edited that her voice, personality, and individual turn of phrase shine through on page after page. *Wonderful adventures of Mrs. Seacole in many lands* is prefaced by a further tribute from the pen of W.H.Russell: 'I trust that England will not forget one who nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them, and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead.'²⁵

England did, of course, forget Mary Seacole very quickly. Prince Victor of Hohenlohe-Langenbourg (afterwards known as Count Gleichen), sculptor and nephew of Queen Victoria, did a bust of her. She was awarded a Crimean medal, and one officer who had known her in the Crimea saw her wearing it in London some years later: 'The medal first attracted my eye . . . Of course I stopped her, and we had a short talk together about Crimean times.'²⁶ But the last 25 years of her life were passed in obscurity. Not, however, in penury, for when she died on 14 May 1881, she left over £2,500. Some money and a diamond ring went to Count Gleichen, and her 'best set of pearl ornaments' was left to his eldest daughter. Rokeby and his daughter were also remembered.²⁷ *The Times* had room for a curt obituary: 'She was present at many battles, and at the risk of her life often carried the wounded off the field.'²⁸

Mary Seacole was buried, by her own wish, in the Roman Catholic section of Kensal Green cemetery. In 1973 her grave was re-consecrated and the headstone was restored.

Ira Aldridge

'The first to show that a black man could scale any heights in thea-

trical art reached by a white man – and recreate with equal artistry the greatest characters in world drama’: that is how Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock sum up the subject of their trail-blazing biography, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian* (1958). They add:

He did this alone, without the aid of any social or political organizations . . . , without any subsidies or scholarships, on his own two feet, with his own skill, versatility and talent.

He did this in a white world, and showed that if a white can blacken his skin to represent Othello, then a black man can whiten his skin to represent Lear, Macbeth, or Shylock with equal artistry.

Aldridge, his biographers conclude, was ‘a pioneer in laying the foundations of that still-to-come theatre of the human race’.¹

Ira Aldridge was born in New York on 24 July 1807. His father, a clerk and lay preacher who became a minister, intended him for the church and sent him to New York’s African Free School, where many future leaders of the American abolitionist movement were educated. But young Ira was attracted to the theatre, at a time when Edmund Kean and other prominent British actors were playing in New York and when the city’s free black community had just launched its own African Theatre. Inspired above all by the black American actor James Hewlett, Aldridge made his début as Rolla in *Pizarro*, a Sheridan adaptation of August von Kotzebue’s *Die Spanier in Peru*. But the only way for a serious and ambitious young black actor to succeed was to emigrate. Accordingly, when he was 17 or 18, Aldridge worked his passage to Liverpool as a ship’s steward.

His first known British performance was at the Royal Coburg (afterwards the Old Vic) on 10 October 1825, as Oroonoko in *The Revolt of Surinam, or A Slave’s Revenge*, an adaptation of Thomas Southerne’s popular play based on Aphra Behn’s novel. The playbill announced him as ‘a *Man of Colour*’ – ‘the theatre’s trump card for novelty appeal’.² It was common practice for an aspirant actor to use an assumed name similar to that of a famous star, and Aldridge was billed as ‘MR. KEENE, Tragedian of Colour’; by 1831 he was ‘F.W. Keene Aldridge, the African Roscius’³ (Quintus Roscius Gallus (d. 62 BC) was the most famous Roman actor of his day); the ‘Keene’ was dropped by 1833.⁴ His first performance had a mixed reception. *The Times* distinguished itself by saying that it was utterly impossible for him to pronounce English properly ‘owing to the shape of his lips’;⁵ the *Globe*, on the other hand, found

his enunciation 'distinct and sonorous' and praised several 'impressive' touches.⁶ Purely on account of Aldridge's colour, the press was largely hostile. Since this hostility prevented Aldridge from establishing himself in London he went to the provinces – first marrying, only six weeks after they met, Margaret Gill, a young 'English lady of respectability and superior accomplishments'.⁷

The next six years or so were Aldridge's apprentice years. He was learning and experimenting. Some ideas, like having Othello go into a swoon, did not come off and were discarded. It was a gruelling training. In 1827 alone he appeared in Sheffield, Halifax, Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Lancaster, Liverpool, and Sunderland, singing to his own guitar as well as acting.⁸ In 1829 he played in Belfast with Edmund Kean's son Charles, and in Hull with the outstanding shakespearean actor Samuel Phelps. Reviews, steadily more favourable, show his dedication to dramatic realism and hard work. His Othello, as seen in Scarborough in 1831, inspired a critical pamphlet describing him as 'certainly an actor of genius'.⁹ At Kendal, in the previous year, he had played a white character for the first time, in an adaptation of a Scott novel; at Hull, in 1832, he tried out several other white roles, including Shylock, Macbeth, and Richard III, using white make-up, a wig, and possibly a beard. There were successful tours of Ireland and Scotland in 1833.

The evidence painstakingly assembled by Marshall and Stock shows that, at the age of 26, with only eight years' professional experience behind him, Aldridge was in 1833 the victim of a sustained London press campaign motivated by naked racism. He was the butt of 'damning criticism and insults', of 'devastating remarks' and 'ridicule'.¹⁰ Indeed, when he went back to London to play Othello at the Covent Garden theatre, the press did all it could to destroy him. To take just one example from many, the *Athenæum* thought it 'impossible that Mr. Aldridge should fully comprehend the meaning and force of even the words he utters' and protested 'in the name of propriety and decency' against 'an interesting actress and lady-like girl, like Miss Ellen Tree' being 'pawed about' on the stage by a black man.¹¹ As Marshall and Stock point out, London was the centre of the pro-slavery lobby, then fighting its final rearguard action against the abolition of slavery in the British colonies:

Their attacks on Aldridge grew more virulent as their position grew indefensible, and the appearance of a Negro playing the finest roles in all drama on the boards of Covent Garden was

itself a damning negation, as Aldridge well knew, of their arguments and 'theories' about the so-called inferior races. So the challenge was not that of actor *versus* actor. It was much more. Aldridge stood upon the stage . . . as the lone protagonist of his oppressed and vilified people.¹²

The theatre's French lessee bowed to the racist storm by cutting short Aldridge's engagement. When, soon afterwards, Aldridge made 11 appearances at the Surrey Theatre, the press campaign against 'the unseemly nigger'¹³ went on, in what was clearly an attempt to inflame the public against him. There was nothing the London papers would not stoop to, including the publication of false reports of the actor's death.

His response to these 'scurrilous scribblings'¹⁴ was to stick to his guns. Outside London, he continued to win respect; a Hull paper said his Othello 'was such as can be equalled by very few actors of the present day'.¹⁵ And professionals of the highest calibre, such as Eliza O'Neill and Maria Malibran, praised his work. In the provinces, he played to crowded houses. Yet the West End stage boycotted him for years: it was 1848 before he again appeared, briefly, at the Surrey. Fed up with 'the endless round of provincial tours, with its heartaches, hardships, and frustrations',¹⁶ and with his failure to break into the West End, Aldridge decided to seek recognition on the Continent. On 14 July 1852, he and his family sailed from England.

On those first two Continental tours Aldridge played in Brussels, Cologne, Frankfurt-on-Main, Basle, Leipzig, Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Danzig, Munich, and Cracow. And he returned to London so loaded with honours that the West End stage could no longer exclude him – though it never welcomed him with anything like the enthusiasm shown abroad. Having become the Chevalier Ira Aldridge, Knight of Saxony, he was at last, in 1858, deemed worthy to act at the Lyceum. Then came an invitation to give 12 performances at St Petersburg's Imperial Theatre, receiving the equivalent of £60 for each performance – about as much as a Russian actor earned for four months' work – and being provided with accommodation and an equipage at government expense. In fact he played on 31 nights, 21 of which were devoted to *Othello*. He was lionized. Though he was playing in English with a German company, the controlled passion of his performances stirred Russian audiences as they had never been stirred before. Théophile Gautier, the French poet and novelist,

saw him act in St Petersburg and testified to the 'stupendous effect' he produced.¹⁷ One Russian critic said that the evenings on which he saw Aldridge's Othello, Lear, Shylock, and Macbeth 'were undoubtedly the best that I have ever spent in the theatre'.¹⁸ 'After Aldridge', wrote another, 'it is impossible to see Othello performed by a white actor, be it Garrick himself.'¹⁹

After another tour of the British provinces in 1859–60, Aldridge went to Russia again. This time he gave 14 performances in Moscow and made several lengthy tours of the provinces in the years 1861–6, visiting many places where no foreign actor had set foot before. He was on tour when he died, in the Polish town of Lodz, on 7 August 1867, at the age of 59. The whole town turned out to mourn the passing of an artist of world stature.

Ira Aldridge left a widow – his second wife, Amanda Pauline von Brandt, a Swedish opera singer – and three young children: Luranah, Ira Frederick, and Amanda (another daughter, Rachel, was born four months after his death and died in infancy). Ira Frederick, talented pianist and composer, died in 1886. Luranah became a professional singer; she died in 1932. Amanda, singer, teacher, and (under the name 'Montague Ring') composer, gave elocution lessons to the young Paul Robeson in 1930 when he was preparing for his first appearance as Othello in London. She died in 1956, on the day before her ninetieth birthday.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

He called himself an Anglo-African and fought against race prejudice all his short life. His was the biggest contribution yet made by a black person to British concert music. He tried to do with black traditional music – in terms of integrating it into concert music – what his contemporaries Dvořák and Grieg were doing with Czech and Norwegian traditional music. From his pen, and his heart, flowed a stream of compositions dedicated to this aim: *African Romances* (op. 17, 1897), *African Suite* (op. 35, 1898), *Overture to the Song of Hiawatha* (op. 30, no. 3, 1899), *Ethiopia Saluting the Colours* (op. 51, 1902), *Four African Dances* (op. 58, 1902), *Six Sorrow Songs* (op. 57, 1904), *Twenty-four Negro Melodies* (op. 59, no. 1, 1904), *Symphonic Variations on an African Air* (op. 63, 1906), and *The Bamboula* (op. 75, 1910). The first performance of his *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* (op. 30, no. 1, 1898) was described by the principal of the Royal College of Music as 'one of the most remarkable events in modern English musical history',¹ and this cantata for tenor solo,

chorus, and orchestra was soon widely acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic.

And yet, for all their interest, colour, vigour, and originality, the works of Britain's Anglo-African composer are now out of fashion. Little of his music is available in printed form; still less, on records. Performances are quite rare. Though he became a 'leader and shining light' to the black cultural renaissance in the United States,² Samuel Coleridge-Taylor is today all but forgotten in the country of his birth.

He was born at 15 Theobalds Road, Holborn, on 15 August 1875. His father, Daniel Peter Hughes Taylor, came to Britain from Sierra Leone in the late 1860s, studied medicine, qualified as Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, practised in Croydon, went back to Africa, was appointed coroner of The Gambia in 1894, and died in Banjul (now Bathurst) in 1904. Recent research by Jeffrey P. Green strongly suggests that Alice Holmans, the Englishwoman who married Daniel Taylor and brought up his son, was not the boy's real mother.³ Samuel was named after the poet; the hyphen came later.

The romantic story has often been told of how the 6-year-old Samuel's musical gifts were discovered by a Croydon violin teacher who saw him playing marbles in the street, clutching a tiny violin in one hand and some marbles in the other. In 1890, at the age of 15, he entered the Royal College of Music as a violin student. His musical education was paid for, according to one account, by a Croydon choirmaster, who felt that an offer by a local firm of piano manufacturers to apprentice the boy to the tuning trade was not suited to his exceptional gifts, and who turned a deaf ear to busy-bodies' claims that black children showed early promise that never came to anything. The RCM principal, Sir George Grove, 'hesitated over Coleridge-Taylor's colour' before admitting him, apparently because he was afraid the other students might object.⁴ Once at least the painfully shy and sensitive young man had the epithet 'nigger' hurled at him by a fellow-student. His professor, Charles Villiers Stanford, overheard and told him he had more music in his little finger than his abuser had in his whole body.⁵ He had dropped his violin studies after two years, switching to composition under Stanford, whom he revered. An admirer of Brahms, Stanford challenged his pupil to write a clarinet quintet without showing Brahms's influence. Reading the manuscript, he exclaimed: 'You've done it, my boy!' When this early work was revived in 1973 the *New York Times* critic called it 'something of an eye-opener . . . an

assured piece of writing in the post-Romantic tradition, sweetly melodic without being cloying, sometimes with a powerful thrust and beautifully written for the five players'.⁶

In 1896 an important influence came into Coleridge-Taylor's life when he met the American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, son of a former slave. Visiting London to give public readings of his works, Dunbar made friends with the composer, three years his junior. Coleridge-Taylor set some of Dunbar's poems to music (*African Romances*) and in 1897 the two men gave joint public performances in London. Another black American whom Coleridge-Taylor met, a year or two later, was Frederick J. Loudin, former director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the choir that had introduced Afro-American spirituals to British audiences in 1873 (see pp. 440–1 below).

By 1898 Elgar, then Britain's leading living composer, was describing Coleridge-Taylor as 'far and away the cleverest fellow amongst the young men' and recommending his *Ballade in A minor* (op. 33, 1898) to the Three Choirs Festival.⁷ Coleridge-Taylor conducted it himself, and its warm reception was a turning-point in his career. A few weeks later came the triumphant first performance of *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, which captivated the public and established him as one of Britain's outstanding young composers. Sir Arthur Sullivan, who was present, wrote in his diary that night: 'Much impressed by the lad's genius. He is a *composer* – not a music-maker. The music is fresh and original . . . his scoring is brilliant and full of colour – at times luscious, rich and sensual.'⁸

Though *Hiawatha* was the most popular English choral-orchestral work from 1898 to 1912, and brought its publishers immense profits, the composer reaped little reward from it. In 1904 Stanford wrote to Elgar, who thought that music publishers were 'considerate': 'If by accident you saw the accounts of Messrs Novello concerning *Hiawatha*, it might open your eyes a little.'⁹ Coleridge-Taylor told a friend: 'If I had retained my rights in the *Hiawatha* music I should have been a rich man. I only received a small sum for it.'¹⁰ According to one source, the first royalty payment for *Hiawatha* totalled three farthings, and this was delivered in an unstamped envelope for which a twopenny fee was charged.¹¹ In order to live, Coleridge-Taylor had to shoulder a formidable load of teaching, conducting, and adjudicating. From 1903 to his death in 1912, he was professor of composition at Trinity College of Music, London, and held various other teaching posts. He was conductor of the Handel Society, the Rochester Choral Society, and the Stock Exchange Orchestral and Choral Society, and was

regularly engaged to conduct provincial orchestras. In the role of adjudicator he was a familiar figure at Eisteddfodau.

In 1904, 1906, and 1910 he visited the USA. The first of these visits was by invitation of an all-black choral society, the 160-strong Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Society of Washington, DC, which had been formed in 1901 with the chief aim of bringing the composer to Washington to conduct a festival of his works. At a time when it was still extremely hard, if not impossible, for talented black Americans to fulfil their cultural aspirations, a large number saw him as a champion. As part of his preparation for the visit, Coleridge-Taylor read *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) by the militant black American leader W.E.B. DuBois, finding it one of the best books he had ever read.¹² His hosts feared that he might become the target of racist insults during his visit. He replied:

As for the prejudice, I am well prepared for it. Surely that which you and many others have lived in for so many years will not quite kill me . . .

I am a great believer in my race, and I never lose an opportunity of letting my white friends here know it. Please don't make any arrangements to wrap me in cotton-wool.¹³

In the event, the 1904 visit was an unqualified triumph. In Washington, thousands of black people turned out to greet their hero and hundreds visited him to pay their respects. The critics praised both his music and his skill as conductor. The audiences gave him tumultuous ovations. He met the famous black educator Booker T. Washington (though he agreed with DuBois that Washington was not militant enough). President Theodore Roosevelt invited him to the White House. In 1906 he repeated his success, with concerts in New York, Boston, and other cities.¹⁴ In 1910 he conducted his own works at a musical festival in Norfolk, Connecticut, and received, once again, a reception that he himself called 'royal', adding: 'I never in my life have known anything like it.'¹⁵

His reception in America was certainly very different from his everyday experience in his native country. His daughter tells of the great pain caused him by the coarse insults of Croydon street lads: 'When he saw them approaching along the street he held my hand more tightly, gripping it until it almost hurt.'¹⁶ He was evidently gripping her hand to stop himself retaliating. Once, at least, he had had enough and, when a 'big lad' shouted 'Blackie', seized the offender by the scruff of the neck and beat him with his walking-stick.¹⁷ But the prejudice he met was not confined to street boys.

His white wife Jessie – she had been a fellow-student at the RCM, and they were married in 1899 despite her parents' objection to a 'mixed marriage' – recalled some instances in her 1943 *Memory Sketch*. There were the two 'silk-hatted "toffs"' who insulted the couple as they passed them in the street. There was the lady who, when the composer was taking a bow at a performance of *Six Sorrow Songs*, loudly exclaimed to her companion: 'What a killing little Nigger!' And there was the Church of England canon who, a guest at tea, leaned forward, gazed at the composer, and remarked: 'It really is surprising: you eat like we do, dress like we do, and talk as we do.'¹⁸

Not long before Coleridge-Taylor's death he read a local newspaper report of a barrister's crudely racist address to a debating society in Purley. He protested vigorously:

Doubtless the 'Purley Circle' is working up for a lynching in the near future . . .

It is amazing that grown-up, and presumably educated people, can listen to such primitive and ignorant nonsense-mongers, who are men without vision, utterly incapable of penetrating beneath the surface of things . . .

There is an appalling amount of ignorance amongst English people regarding the Negro and his doings . . .

Personally, I consider myself the equal of any white man who ever lived, and no one could change me in that respect; on the other hand, no man reverences worth more than I, irrespective of colour and creed. May I further remind the lecturer that really great people always see the best in others; it is the little man who looks for the worst – and finds it . . .

It was an arrogant 'little' white man who dared to say to the great Dumas, 'and I hear you actually have negro blood in you!' 'Yes', said the witty writer; 'My father was a Mulatto, his father a Negro, and his father a monkey. My ancestry begins where yours ends!'

Somehow I always manage to remember that wonderful answer when I meet a certain type of white man (a type, thank goodness! as far removed from the best as the Poles from each other) and the remembrance makes me feel quite happy – wickedly happy, in fact!¹⁹

Coleridge-Taylor's 'racial solidarity', as it has been termed,²⁰ was never so warmly displayed as when black visitors called unex-

pectedly at his house. One such visitor, a shabby-looking man shouldering a stick with a bundle tied up in a brightly coloured handkerchief, asked the composer to hear him sing – and turned out to have a fine voice, the result being an introduction to a London concert agent, with a subsequent platform appearance.²¹

Strangely neglected in most accounts of Coleridge-Taylor's life is his consistent support for the Pan-African movement (whose rise is described in a later section of this chapter). He took charge of the musical side of the programme at the Pan-African Conference held at Westminster Town Hall in July 1900, and was elected to the executive committee of the Pan-African Association.²² Twelve years later, when Dusé Mohamed Ali succeeded in launching the *African Times and Orient Review* in London, Coleridge-Taylor wrote shrewdly in the first issue:

There is, of course, a large section of the British people interested in the coloured races; but it is, generally speaking, a commercial interest only. Some of these may possibly be interested in the aims and desires of the coloured peoples; but, taking them on a whole, I fancy one accomplished fact carries far more weight than a thousand aims and desires, regrettable though it may be . . .

Therefore, it is imperative that this venture be heartily supported by the coloured people themselves, so that it shall be absolutely independent of the whites as regards circulation. Such independence will probably speak to the average Britisher far more than anything else, and will ultimately arouse his attention and interest – even to his support.²³

Two months after these words were printed, the first black composer to win world fame and recognition died of double pneumonia at the tragically early age of 37. 'There will be thousands', wrote Sir Hubert Parry, principal of the RCM, 'who will feel a sense of saddening loss when . . . they miss the arresting face in which gentleness, humour, and modesty were so strangely combined with authoritative decision when matters of art were in question.'²⁴ Among those thousands were the black people living in Britain. One of the wreaths at the composer's funeral was in the shape of a map of Africa. It came 'From the Sons and Daughters of West Africa at present residing in England'.²⁵

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor left two children. Hiawatha (born 1900) became a conductor, notably of his father's music. Avril (born

Gwendolyn, 1903) had a distinguished career in her own right as composer and conductor.

Challenges from Asia

We have seen that Asians were among the black pageant performers in seventeenth-century London; that Asians were among the black servants in this country in the eighteenth century; that Indian seamen, known as Lascars, were among London's black poor in the 1780s; and that a small shifting population of Lascars were a shamefully ill-treated group in this country in the early part of the nineteenth century. In the 1850s Indian seamen, during their stay in Britain, were still enduring appalling conditions. They were 'herded like cattle', six or eight to a single room without bedding, chairs, or tables. Those who fell ill lay in hospitals or workhouses 'in a most desolate condition', unable to communicate their needs across the language barrier. In the winter of 1856–7 eight Indian seamen died of cold and hunger in the London streets, and the coroner said that, in the past few years, he had held 40 such inquests.¹

The treatment these seamen met with in Britain had evidently given them 'the very reverse of a favourable impression of the Christian religion'. So a group of philanthropists around the Revd Henry Venn, secretary of the Church Missionary Society, opened a 'Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans, and South Sea Islanders' in West India Dock Road, Limehouse, with room for 150 people. It was opened in 1857, barely a month after the start of India's first War of Independence – the brutally suppressed 'Mutiny'.

Joseph Salter, who spent much of his time trying to convert them to christianity, claimed that around this time as many as 2,000 Lascars had been visiting Britain every year. But this seems an exaggerated figure in the light of Salter's account of a missionary tour he made in 1869 'in search of the wandering Asiatic'. In Glasgow, Sterling, Leith, Edinburgh, Sunderland, Durham, Hull, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bath, Bristol, Southampton, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, and Brighton, he met and spoke to a total of 81 Indians. Eighteen of them were in Liverpool and 14 in Manchester; in Birmingham he found three lodging-houses for Asians.²

The first Asian in Britain to engage in any kind of political activity was Raja Rammohan Roy, who was here from 1830 to 1833. Poet, philosopher, reformer, and journalist, he was the first Brahman to

visit London, where he became a friend of the English radical Jeremy Bentham. During his stay Roy submitted to the parliamentary committee on Indian affairs a memorandum which was 'the first authentic statement of Indian views placed before the British authorities by an eminent Indian'. Both Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore, who visited Britain in 1842 – he was grandfather of the great Bengali poet – 'felt the need of carrying on propaganda in England on behalf of India, and made permanent arrangements for this work'.³ Roy's English friend the Revd William Adam helped to form a British India Society in 1839 ('for bettering the conditions of our fellow-subjects – the Natives of British India') and edited its journal, the *British Indian Advocate* (1841–2).⁴

A 'small band of Indians' in the nineteenth century 'made England their centre of activity for the political advancement of India by awakening the consciousness of the British people to their sense of duty towards India and appealing to their democratic instincts and liberal principles'.⁵ The most distinguished of them was Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Asian elected to the House of Commons.

Son of a Parsee priest, Naoroji was born in Bombay in 1825 and, at the age of 29, became the first Indian professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. He came to Britain in 1855 as a partner in the first Indian business house in this country, and was appointed professor of Gujarati at University College, London. In 1859 he set up in business on his own account and began to agitate against the discriminatory system of recruitment to the Indian civil service. From then on, Naoroji 'seldom missed an opportunity of voicing the grievances of Indians', becoming indeed 'an unofficial ambassador for India in England'.⁶

In 1865 he helped form the London Indian Society and served as its president. Its object was to bring English people and Indians together at social gatherings and exchange views on subjects connected with India. Two other organizations Naoroji helped to found were the London Zoroastrian Association (1861), dedicated to the welfare of Parsees living in Britain, and the East India Association (1866), which was eventually taken over by Anglo-Indians opposed to Naoroji's aim of 'India for the Indians'.⁷

After unsuccessfully contesting Holborn in the 1886 general election, Naoroji became famous overnight when the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, declared in a speech that 'however great the progress of mankind has been, and however far we have advanced in overcoming prejudices, I doubt if we have yet got to that point of view where a British constituency would elect a black man'.⁸ 'Those

two words – BLACK MAN – simply kicked Dadabhai into fame’, writes his biographer. ‘The name of the hitherto little-known Indian . . . was within twenty-four hours on the lips of everyone throughout the United Kingdom!’⁹ Salisbury’s opponents took him literally; and since Naoroji was conspicuously pale-complexioned, the prime minister was regarded as having committed a colossal gaffe. The National Liberal Club gave a banquet in Naoroji’s honour ‘to mark their disapproval of Lord Salisbury’s intolerant language’,¹⁰ and for long he was known as ‘Salisbury’s black man’. Despite frantic efforts to stir up race prejudice – the Tories put it about that he was a fire-worshipper – Naoroji was elected Liberal MP for Central Finsbury in 1892. His majority of three earned him the punning nickname ‘Narrow Majority’. He lost the seat three years later and was heavily defeated when he stood in North Lambeth in 1907.

But for Naoroji election to the British Parliament had been ‘only a means to an end; the welfare of India was his daily thought’.¹¹ And for him the welfare of India was synonymous with that of the Indian National Congress, which he called ‘the child of the British rule’.¹² He was its president in 1886, 1893, and 1906, and it was on his urging that a British committee of the Congress was formed in 1889. He campaigned long and hard, with pen and voice, to tell the British people about the wrongs being done to India in their name.

He did not altogether lack for allies. One of his close friends was the British socialist pioneer H.M. Hyndman, who wrote to him in 1884: ‘I always told you . . . that little could be done for India unless we had a revolution here . . . There is no hope for you unless we move here and your movement helps our movement.’¹³ Hyndman got to know Naoroji after casually picking up a copy of his pamphlet *Poverty of India* (1878) and noticing that the statistics it contained were just what he needed to clinch the argument of an article he had written on ‘The Bankruptcy of India’.¹⁴ Hyndman’s book of the same name, published eight years later, was the first attempt by a British writer to show the connection between political tyranny and economic exploitation in the British Empire. At the time of Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee Naoroji and Hyndman collaborated in an ‘Anti-Famine’ agitation, and Hyndman spoke of a ‘British-made famine’ in India.¹⁵ Whether or not Hyndman’s influence had anything to do with it, Naoroji was moving steadily to the left year by year and his denunciation of British imperialism became steadily sharper. In 1904 he was an honoured guest at the

International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam. He spoke of the drain of India's wealth and her people's poverty. Hope of a remedy, he went on,

rests in the hands of the working classes. Working men constitute the immense majority of the people of India, and they appeal to the workmen of the whole world, and ask for their help and sympathy. Let them condemn the wrongs done in India. We constantly denounce barbarities. What does barbarity mean? Does it not mean that, when a savage knocks down a weaker man and robs him, an act of barbarism has been perpetrated? The same applies to nations, and this is the way in which the British Government is treating India. This must end . . . The remedy is in the hands of the British people. They must compel their Government to fulfil the promises that have been made to India. The remedy is to give India self-government.¹⁶

Without opposition, the congress carried a resolution branding Britain with 'the mark of shame for its treatment of India'.¹⁷

India's first great statesman – and the economist 'who laid the foundation of an Indian school of economic thinking'¹⁸ – died in Bombay at the age of 91. Highest reward of his life, Naoroji had said, was the title 'Grand Old Man of India'.¹⁹

Co-founder with Naoroji of the London Indian Society was the lawyer Womesh Chandra Bonnerjee. Born in 1844 in the Kidderpore district of Calcutta, Bonnerjee came to Britain in 1864 to study law. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geological Society, and was called to the bar in 1868 (a few months after Monmohon Ghose, the first Indian to be called to the English bar). Bonnerjee went home to practise in the Calcutta high court, served as first president of the Indian National Congress when it was formed in 1885, and led its first deputation to Britain. In 1889 Bonnerjee helped to organize the British Committee of the Indian National Congress, one of whose aims was 'to rouse the English working classes to a sense of the duties which England owes to India'; this committee published a journal, *India* (1890–1921) 'to popularise Indian thoughts and aspirations in England'. Bonnerjee twice stood for Parliament, unsuccessfully, as a Liberal, settled permanently in Britain in 1902, and died in 1906.²⁰

Bonnerjee was a moderate, as was Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownagree, who sat as Conservative MP for Bethnal Green North-East from 1895 to 1906.²¹ But from the middle of the nine-

teenth century onwards the political history of Indian students and intellectuals in Britain is one of gradual but steady radicalization. This is clear from Naoroji's own political evolution; it is equally clear when we compare four pioneers of the Indian National Congress who each spent some time in Britain as students – Surendranath Banerjea, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Ananda Mohan Bose, and Lal Mohan Ghosh – with their successors who were students here in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Banerjea and Dutt, both born in Calcutta in 1848, came to Britain together in 1868 to take the Indian civil service examinations. Banerjea went back to India in 1871, was dismissed from his post as assistant magistrate on a technicality, and was in Britain again in 1874–5 to make an unsuccessful appeal to the India Office. Two years later he founded the Indian Association, precursor of the Indian National Congress; his 1877–8 speaking tour of India, described as a triumphal progress, marked the dawn of the modern nationalist movement there. A superb orator, Banerjea was twice president of the Congress and for 20 years remained one of its principal leaders. But he led the moderate wing out of the Congress in 1918, accepted a ministry and a knighthood, and retired from politics after a crushing electoral defeat. He died in 1925.²²

R.C.Dutt, after a career in the Indian civil service, was in 1897 appointed lecturer in Indian history at London University. He served as president of the Indian National Congress in 1899. Besides historical and other novels, he wrote works, still consulted today, on economics, economic history, and the ancient civilization of India. He died in 1909.²³

A.M.Bose was born in the Bengal village of Jaisiddhi in 1847. An outstandingly brilliant student, he came to Britain in 1870 to read higher mathematics at Cambridge, where he distinguished himself by becoming the first Indian Wrangler (i.e. he was placed first class in the mathematical tripos). Later he was called to the bar. In 1872 he formed an Indian Society in London to 'foster the spirit of nationalism among the Indian residents in Britain', and afterwards co-operated with Banerjea in launching the Indian Association. Bose died in 1906.²⁴

Lal Mohan Ghosh, born in Krishnanagar in 1849, was in Britain from 1869 to 1873, qualified as a barrister, and visited Britain again in 1879–80 and 1883 to agitate for reform in India. In 1883 and 1886 he stood as a Liberal Party candidate in Deptford but was defeated. He was elected president of the Indian National Congress in 1903 and died in 1909.²⁵

So much for the moderates. By the turn of the century, the bulk of Indian students and intellectuals in Britain accepted the need for an armed struggle against British occupation. For a time the central figure here was Shyamaji Krishnavarma, founder in 1905 of *The Indian Sociologist*, a monthly journal, published first in London then in Paris, which had much influence on Indian opinion. Born into a poor family in the Kathiawar peninsula in 1857, Krishnavarma first came to Britain in 1879 to read Sanskrit at Balliol, law in the Inner Temple. He took his BA, was called to the bar, and went back to India in 1885. He began to advocate 'complete non-co-operation with the foreigner in maintaining his domination over India',²⁶ and in 1897 left India to avoid arrest. In London he would show sympathetic visitors 'a mass of papers which revealed . . . the tyranny of the British Government cloaked under an astute semblance of justice'.²⁷ As the government's dislike of him grew, so did his popularity among young Indians. He gave 10,000 rupees to send back to India a succession of 'political missionaries': young men who had come to Britain for their education and had developed into dedicated revolutionaries. He gathered round him in London a group of such young men, and on 18 February 1905 they launched the Indian Home Rule Society.

No systematic attempt has ever been made [Krishnavarma wrote] to enlighten the British public with regard to the grievances, demands and aspirations of the people of India. It will be our duty and privilege to plead the cause of India and its unrepresented millions before the bar of public opinion in Great Britain and Ireland.²⁸

The Indian Home Rule Society had the support of Hyndman, who formally opened its headquarters, India House, at 65 Cromwell Avenue, Highgate, on 1 July 1905.²⁹ India House served both as a hostel for Indian students in London and a centre for their political education. They learned, among other things, how to make bombs. An apologist for British rule was to describe the Indian Home Rule Society in 1910 as 'the most dangerous organization outside India'.³⁰ *The Indian Sociologist*, subtitled 'an organ of freedom, and of political, social, and religious reform', stood for absolute freedom from British control, advocated extreme passive resistance, and supported active resistance in so far as civil liberties were repressed by the British authorities. Under the impact of the Russian revolution of 1905, Krishnavarma told his supporters: 'It seems that any agitation in India now, must be carried on secretly

and that the only methods which can bring the English Government to its senses are the Russian methods vigorously and incessantly applied until the English relax their tyranny and are driven out of the country.'³¹

Increasingly anxious about the rise of nationalist feeling among Indian students in Britain, the British authorities called a meeting of them, chaired by Lord Lamington, a former governor of Bombay. Feelings ran high, especially when Sir William Lee-Warner, formerly a secretary in the India Office's political and secret departments, called one of the young Indians present, Kunjabihari Bhat-tacharyya, a 'dirty nigger', whereupon another young Indian, Vasudeo Bhattacharyya, punched him in the face, an offence for which he was afterwards fined.³²

At least two of the revolutionaries around Krishnavarma gave up their studies to become full-time workers in the freedom movement. One was a brilliant young man called Pandurang Mahadev Bapat, later famous throughout India as Senapati Bapat. Born into a poor Brahman family at Parner, Maharashtra, in 1880, he came to Edinburgh in 1904 to study mechanical engineering. Deprived of his scholarship for writing a pamphlet demanding home rule for India, he went back to India in 1908, spent five years underground, and was imprisoned by the British five times – on the last two occasions for a total of 14 years. In 1955 he played a leading part in the liberation of Goa from Portuguese rule.³³

Another of Krishnavarma's ardent supporters was Lala Hardyal. Born in Delhi in 1884, he came to Britain in 1905 to read modern history at Oxford. But, having decided that 'no Indian who really loves his country ought to compromise his principle and barter his rectitude for any favour whatever at the hands of alien oppressive rulers of India', he gave up his scholarship to become a full-time revolutionary and went back to India in 1908. He was later active in the United States in the cause of Indian freedom.³⁴

The outstanding member of this group of young Indian nationalists in Britain in the first decade of the present century was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (Veer Savarkar), who was to play a significant part in every subsequent phase of the Indian freedom struggle. He was born in 1883 in the village of Bhagur, near Nasik in Maharashtra, and at the age of 16 he formed a political organization aiming at complete independence. Its slogan was 'instruction and insurrection'. In 1906 Savarkar came to London, where he founded the Free India Society with the aim of recruiting Indian students to the revolutionary movement.

In May of the following year Indian students in Britain honoured the fiftieth anniversary of the War of Independence by wearing badges commemorating the martyrs. There were scuffles when British jingoists tried to tear these badges off, and a vehement press campaign was launched against Krishnavarma, who prudently left London for Paris. He died in Geneva in 1930.³⁵ After Krishnavarma left London, Savarkar took over the management of India House. One of the visitors there was an English boy of 16, David Garnett, who was deeply impressed by Savarkar's personal magnetism. In his memoirs *The Golden Echo* (1953), Garnett has this description of him:

He was small, slight in build, with very broad cheekbones, a delicate aquiline nose, a sensitive, refined mouth and an extremely pale skin . . . His was the most sensitive face in the room and yet the most powerful . . . There was an intensity of faith in the man and a curious single-minded recklessness which were deeply attractive to me.

The only member of the group whom Garnett disliked turned out to be a police informer.³⁶ Not, however, a very effective one, since he failed to prevent the assassination of Sir William Curzon Wyllie, the man whose task at the India Office was to keep watch on the political views and activities of Indian students in Britain.

In 1909 an Indian student named Madan Lal Dhingra – born in the Punjab about the year 1887, he had come to Britain when he was about 18 – went to the annual meeting of the National Indian Association at the Imperial Institute, and shot Wyllie dead with a Colt revolver. The police found on Dhingra a written statement which they confiscated and whose existence they denied. But Savarkar had another copy and, when Dhingra was sentenced to death, asked David Garnett to try to get it published. Garnett took it to Robert Lynd of the *Daily News* and it was published, much to the annoyance of the police, on the morning of the execution:

I attempted to shed English blood as an humble revenge for the inhuman hangings and deportations of patriotic Indian youths . . .

I believe that a nation held down by foreign bayonet is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to a disarmed race I attacked by surprise . . .

As a Hindoo I felt that wrong to my country is an insult to God.³⁷

The police closed down India House. Savarkar fled to France but returned several months later and was arrested. After an unsuccessful rescue attempt by Indian and Irish revolutionaries he was sent to India for trial. Near Marseilles he escaped from the ship through a porthole but was recaptured. Sentenced to two consecutive transportations for life, he spent ten years in jail on the Andaman Islands. Deprived of pen and paper, he scratched his poems on the walls of his cell with thorns and pebbles, and learnt by heart more than 10,000 lines of his poetry till they reached his people through the mouths of returning fellow-exiles. He had been a living legend for many years when he died in 1966.³⁸

Three other prominent Indian nationalist visitors to Britain remain to be mentioned: Gokhale, Pal, and Tilak. The first represents the 'moderate', the other two the 'extremist', wing of the Congress.

Regarded by some as 'a discerning liberal', by others as 'a faint-hearted "Moderate"', Gopal Krishna Gokhale made in all seven visits to Britain – 'political pilgrimages' to put India's case before the British public – in the years 1897–1914. Born in 1866 in a village in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, south of Bombay, he first came to give evidence before the Welby Commission on the administration of India's expenditure. In 1905 he came as a representative of the Congress and, amongst other meetings, spoke to the National Liberal Club – on 'England's Duty to India' and the 'Awakening of India' – and to the Fabian Society. He told the Fabians that the way India was administered was 'unworthy of free England', being based largely on 'confidential police reports, . . . and on hostility towards the educated classes'. The next year Gokhale was back, speaking to Indian students at Cambridge and Oxford. In 1908 he was here again; there was another, brief, visit in 1912; his last visits, in 1913 and 1914, were as a member of the Public Services Commission, appointed 'to consider the claims of Indians to higher and more extensive employment in the public service connected with the civil administration of the country'. Gokhale never lost his faith in British justice, fair play, and rule of law. But when he died in 1915 it was clear to many Indians that more than faith was needed.³⁹

Whereas Gokhale's main British support came from the Liberal Party, the 'extremists' Bipin Chandra Pal and Bal Gangadhar Tilak found their natural allies in Britain on the left. First and most pugnacious of their left-wing allies was Keir Hardie. During his visit to

India in 1907 he spent some days touring the villages near Poona with Tilak as his guide, and his eyes were opened to the true character of British imperialism. (Thus a 'vivid memory which stayed with [Keir Hardie] was of the close watch kept on him in Poona by the C.I.D.; it so enraged him that he publicly threatened to expose these "un-British" methods on his return to England'.)⁴⁰ So when the great nationalist orator Pal came to this country in 1908 it was natural for Hardie to welcome and befriend him. It was not Pal's first visit. Born in 1858, in the Sylhet district of what is now Bangladesh, Pal had studied theology in Britain in 1898, and was in fact one of the first of the nationalist-minded students to throw up his scholarship in favour of full-time political activity. In March 1910 Pal was a guest at the annual conference of the Independent Labour Party. After a resolution was carried urging that the Indian people be granted the rights of lawful association and freedom of speech, Pal was 'received with great enthusiasm by the delegates'. He spoke very briefly, saying he was grateful to the conference for having accepted the resolution, 'although he did not suppose that their protest would put wisdom into the brains of the government. Nothing would do that except the extremity of circumstances'.⁴¹ In the following year Pal went back to India, where he died in 1932.

Tilak was a later and, in terms of success as a lobbyist, a more effective visitor. Leaving aside Pal's reception by the ILP, Tilak was the first Indian leader to approach the British people, not through drawing-room gatherings, but through working-class organizations and newspapers. During his 1918–19 visit he was to be seen at the Labour Party conference and the Trades Union Congress. The Labour movement gave him platforms all over the country, and Lansbury's *Daily Herald* published several of his articles and strongly supported the demand for Indian home rule.⁴² Known as 'the Father of Indian unrest', Tilak was born in Ratnagiri in 1856. In 1897 he was sentenced to 18 months in jail for sedition. Between 1908 and 1914 he was imprisoned in the Mandalay jail in Burma, having been transported on a charge of 'bringing into hatred and contempt and exciting disloyalty and feelings of enmity towards His Majesty and the Government established by Law in British India'. When Tilak's wife died in 1912 Keir Hardie tried to get the sentence remitted, but the authorities were implacable. Tilak came to Britain in 1918, not primarily as a propagandist, but to fight an unsuccessful libel action against Sir Valentine Chirol, a former foreign editor of *The Times*. His visit has been called 'the first serious attempt on the part of India to enlighten the British people

about Indian affairs and make them realize that the administration of India was carried on in their name, and that therefore they were responsible for the poverty, disease and illiteracy of the country'.⁴³

During his stay he made friends with George Lansbury, Ramsay MacDonald, Sidney Webb, and Bernard Shaw; and only then did India become one of the main planks in the Labour Party's programme. An illuminating aspect of the visit was the 'sharp eye' kept on Tilak by Scotland Yard – though the policemen who spied on him 'never made their presence felt',⁴⁴ which must have disappointed Tilak a little since he used to say that 'he always liked to have a talk with the secret police because from his talks with them he read the mind of the Government'.⁴⁵ The confidential reports on Tilak show that the police spies invariably found sinister motives for everything he did and said; but most of the reports were 'mere gossip or unfounded speculation, by which the writers hoped to please their superiors'.⁴⁶ Tilak died in 1920, soon after his return to India.

We have surveyed the rise of one of the two anti-imperialist political traditions that developed among black people living in Britain while Britain held their countries in bondage. The Asian anti-imperialist tradition was also represented in this country between the First and Second World Wars, as will appear. We turn now to the corresponding tradition created, largely in Britain, by Africans and people of African descent.

The rise of Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism, one of the major political traditions of the twentieth century, was largely created by black people living in Britain. In 1787 Ottobah Cugoano published in London his *Thoughts and sentiments on the evil and wicked traffic of the slavery and commerce of the human species*. In that seminal book, at the very dawn of the abolitionist movement, an African writer not only demanded freedom for the slaves but also forecast 'universal calamity' for the 'criminal nations' that profited from their enslavement. Two years later, Cugoano's friend Olaudah Equiano published in London his *Interesting Narrative*. These two writers together anticipated many of the leading ideas of Pan-Africanism: racial solidarity and self-awareness; Africa for the Africans; opposition to racial discrimination; emancipation from white supremacy and domination. With their

work begins the prehistory of Pan-Africanism – or, in other words, the history of ‘proto-Pan-Africanism’.¹

Of the forerunners and creators of Pan-Africanism, some were born in Britain, others visited this country for varying periods. Why was Britain the womb of the movement? Chiefly because it was the centre of a fast-expanding empire. It was here that Africans, West Indians, Afro-Americans, and Anglo-Africans could most conveniently meet, exchange ideas, create networks of contacts. And, when the time was ripe to organize, it was here that they could most easily launch a movement that challenged the whole imperialist system.²

At the turn of the century the British Empire was so powerful that it seemed to its rulers as if the sun would never set on it. But the first Pan-African Conference, held in London in 1900, gave notice to the white imperialists who ruled over millions of Africans and West Indians that their minority rule could not last for ever. And within two generations decolonization was no longer a dream, but a fact.

Delany, Blyden, and Horton

The most important north American ‘proto-Pan-Africanist’ was the Pittsburgh-born, Harvard-trained physician Martin Robison Delany, explorer, soldier, orator, novelist, abolitionist, radical, and black nationalist, who spent the last eight months of 1860 in Britain. He was to be the first black soldier commissioned with field rank by President Lincoln – at 53 he became a major in the 104th Regiment of United States Colored Troops. And he was one of the first to use a form of the slogan, ‘Africa for the African’.

A pioneer of the ‘Back to Africa’ dream, Delany anticipated also many of the more realistic tenets of Pan-Africanism. He was dedicated to black self-regeneration and the redemption of Africa. He held that the only way for black people to overcome the destructive effects of white racism was to assert a separate course of action for themselves. Afro-Americans, to whom his main message was directed, must see themselves as a distinct group in the United States whose cultural heritage was African, not European. They must recognize and appreciate the achievements, cultural stability, and humanism of ancient African civilizations. And they must work for racial solidarity with black people elsewhere in the world.³

Delany, who had just led an expedition into equatorial Africa, came to Britain as a delegate to the fourth International Statistical Congress. A distinguished participant in the congress, and the pres-

ident of one of its sections, was the elderly Lord Brougham, former lord chancellor and an uncompromising enemy of slavery. On the platform on the opening day, among the assembled dignitaries from some 20 countries, sat George Mifflin Dallas, United States minister in London. After an inaugural address by Prince Albert, Lord Brougham electrified the delegates by remarking: 'I hope my friend Mr. Dallas will forgive me reminding him that there is a negro present, a member of the Congress.' There was 'loud laughter and vociferous cheering', after which Delany stood up in the body of the hall and said quietly: 'I pray your Royal Highness will allow me to thank his Lordship, who is always a most unflinching friend of the negro, for the observation he has made, and I assure your Royal Highness and his Lordship that I am a man.' 'This novel and unexpected incident', wrote *The Times*, 'elicited a round of cheering very extraordinary for an assemblage of sedate statisticians.'

One of the two white American delegates, Georgia-born Judge Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, reacted by walking out of the congress, writing a long, angry letter to the *Morning Chronicle*, and reporting to his government that Brougham's action was 'an assault upon our country, a wanton indignity offered to our minister, and a pointed insult offered to me'. But Dallas himself, who could hardly believe his ears, sat tight and said nothing; he wrote in his diary that night: 'It was a premeditated contrivance to provoke me into some unseemly altercation with the coloured personage . . . Is not the government answerable for this insult? Or must it be regarded as purely the personal indecency of Lord Brougham?' Was Brougham, he wondered, 'on this question of slavery, deranged?' White Americans in London told him they wished he had 'knocked the old blackguard down'.

Delany was a focus of attention during the five further days the congress was in session, and on the last of them there was 'great applause' when he made a short speech of thanks:

I should be insensible, indeed, if I should permit this Congress to adjourn without expressing my gratitude for the cordial manner in which I have been received . . . I am not foolish enough to suppose that it was from any individual merit of mine, but it was that outburst of expression of sympathy for my race . . . whom I represent, and who have gone the road of that singular Providence of degradation, that all other races in some time of the world's history have gone, but from which, thank God, they are now fast being regenerated. I again tender

my most sincere thanks and heartfelt greetings to those distinguished gentlemen with whom I have been privileged to associate, and by whom I have been received on terms of the most perfect equality.

Delany was asked to read a paper to the Royal Geographical Society on his African expedition, and he spent seven months addressing crowded anti-slavery meetings in England and Scotland.⁴

During Delany's stay in Britain he and his colleague and fellow-explorer Robert Campbell, a Jamaican science teacher, were approached by the English philanthropist Dr Thomas Hodgkin, who had helped to found the British and Foreign Aborigines' Protection Society in 1837. Hodgkin now had it in mind to form an 'African Association' to foster African economic, social, and political development and combat racism and colonialism. He had discussed this project in 1859 in correspondence with Thomas Hughes, a member of the Cape Coast municipal council in West Africa, with the caveat that he did not wish to stir Africans to 'wild revolutionary or democratic struggles'. All that materialized while Delany was in Britain was an African Aid Society, which published a journal called *African Times* and saw Africans and Afro-Americans as objects of philanthropy rather than agents in their own struggles. But on 7 November 1861, the 'Native African Association and their Friends' met in Hodgkin's house. Besides British abolitionists, the 12 people who attended included an R.Campbell – probably but not certainly Delany's Jamaican colleague – and the Haitian chargé d'affaires. The meeting discussed plans for collaboration between British abolitionists, Africans, Afro-Americans, and Haitians. These plans seem to have come to nothing; but the ideas later to be called Pan-Africanism were clearly in the air.⁵

Such ideas were to be put forward in 13 books by Edward Wilmot Blyden, who served as Liberian commissioner to Britain in 1861–2 and, after six visits to Britain, as Liberian ambassador here in 1877–8 and 1892, and as envoy extraordinary to London and Paris in 1905. Born in 1832 of free parents on the Danish-held island of St Thomas, and refused admission to an American university because of his colour, Blyden was 'the most articulate and brilliant vindicator' of black interests in the nineteenth century. His aim was to create among black people pride, confidence, and cultural identity, and he has been called 'the most important historical progenitor of Pan-Africanism'.⁶

But his proto-Pan-Africanism was not unflawed. He romanti-

cized Africa, believed that the 'African personality' was not cut out for political or scientific achievement, and, towards the end of his life, praised European missionaries, including the openly racist ones, and welcomed European colonialism as a vehicle of progress for Africa.⁷ There was in fact an irrational element in his outlook, exemplified by his deep hatred of people of mixed race, which may have been what led him to boycott the Pan-African Conference in 1900.⁸

If Blyden prefigures one of the two main contrasting trends within Pan-Africanism – the mystical concept of *Négritude* – his friend James Africanus Beale Horton, whose pride in his race was no less intense but was securely grounded in a rational outlook, gave early expression to the other. Like Blyden, Horton called for independent action by Africans; unlike Blyden, he called on Africans to master Europe's advanced technology. Like Blyden, he stood for racial equality; unlike Blyden, he did not suppose that races were unchanging and complementary, but believed that all races shared the ability to draw from the storehouse of human achievements.⁹

Born near Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1835, the son of an Igbo snatched from a slave-ship, Horton spent five years at King's College, London, and became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1858. In the following year he graduated from Edinburgh University as MD and was commissioned in the British army for service in West Africa, with the rank of staff assistant surgeon. One of the first African doctors trained in Europe and one of the first African regular officers, he retired after 20 years with the rank of surgeon-major. He wrote four medical and three political books. His major book, *West African Countries and Peoples* (1868), was the first call for self-government by a West African author. It had two aims: 'to prove the capability of the African for possessing a real political government and national independence'; and to develop among the different nationalities of West Africa 'a true political science'.¹⁰

The heart of this book – as its sub-title 'A Vindication of the African Race' suggests – is its trenchant attack on pseudo-scientific racism. Horton's demonstration that 'the African people is a permanent and enduring people'¹¹ has been termed his greatest contribution to emerging Pan-Africanism. But we should not forget his defence of the African historical past; his 'practical and far-seeing'¹² scheme for a West African university, with special emphasis on the teaching of science and the education of females; his detailed blueprint for West African independence; his call for the

industrialization of Africa; his interest (shared with Blyden) in the construction of railways in West Africa; his creation of West Africa's first bank.¹³ He was one of the foremost pioneers of the national liberation movement in both Ghana and Nigeria.¹⁴ Above all, he was a pioneer of practical Pan-Africanism: 'representative rather than exceptional: a figure within a broad movement . . . of Pan-African economic and social modernization'.¹⁵ He was only 48 when he died in 1883. Until recently he was largely forgotten. But, in George Shepperson's phrase, he was 'the father of modern African political thought',¹⁶ and his optimism, his faith in the rising generation, have a clear message for our own day.

Celestine Edwards

Another long-forgotten forerunner of Pan-Africanism was Samuel Jules Celestine Edwards. He was the youngest of nine children of a poor French-speaking couple on the Caribbean island of Dominica, where he was born on 28 December 1858 (or possibly 1859). When he was about 12 he stowed away on a French ship and became a seaman, a temperance advocate, a strongly anti-freethought christian, and a staunch upholder of human rights and brotherhood. Sometime in the 1870s he settled in Britain, plunged into activity in the temperance movement in Edinburgh, and spoke on the movement's behalf elsewhere in Scotland. About the year 1880 he moved to Sunderland. Then he went to live in London's East End, earning a living as a casual building worker and soon gaining a reputation as a public speaker in Victoria Park. His lectures on temperance and religion often contained references to black people's problems and future. He told a Newcastle audience:

My ancestors proudly trod the sands of the African continent; but from their home and friends were dragged into the slave mart and sold to the planters of the West Indies . . . The very thought that my race should have been so grievously wronged is almost more than I can bear . . . Of the condition of my people today I but tarry to say that by diligence, thought, and care they have given the lie to many a false prophet who, prior to their Emancipation, sought to convince the world that the black man was in all respects unfit for freedom . . . Their position . . . today is one over which I proudly rejoice. To their future I look with confidence.¹⁷

In a lecture in Hackney, on 16 September 1886, he had this to say

of racism: 'It is a sad and terrible thing to see nigh a whole generation of men and women comparing those whose skins are black to baboons and the like.'¹⁸

Despite long hours of physical toil, Celestine Edwards found time to write penny pamphlets on religious questions and a biography of Walter Hawkins, a former slave who had become bishop of a Canadian church; to study at King's College, London, where his fellow-students of theology held him in 'high esteem and great love',¹⁹ and where he took a theological degree in 1891; to embark on the study of medicine; and to accept the editorship of two magazines, thus becoming Britain's first black editor. *Lux*, 'a weekly Christian Evidence Newspaper', appeared from 1892 to 1895. *Fraternity*, published from 1893 to 1897, was the monthly organ of the Society for the Recognition of the Brotherhood of Man, of which Celestine Edwards was executive secretary²⁰ and which numbered Quaker humanitarians among its members. These two journals are prototypes of what Ian Duffield has called 'the religious mode of the Pan-African struggle for vindicating the dignity and humanity of black people'. *Fraternity* especially, with its declaration of war on racism, 'was a large step towards the production in Britain of a politically committed Pan-African press'.²¹

In an impassioned protest against the imminent British seizure of Uganda, Celestine Edwards wrote in a *Lux* editorial at the end of 1892:

As long as such unrighteous deeds as cold-blooded murders are permitted under the British flag, as long as avarice and cupidity prompt the actions of a missionary nation, . . . so long we shall protest against public money being spent in the interest of land-grabbers . . .

The injustice under which [the black man] is smarting will come home to his oppressors' children's children . . . He will surprise and disappoint those who never dreamt that the quiet, happy-go-lucky black would turn like the worm upon those who wronged him . . . If the British nation stole no more, they have stolen enough and have sufficient responsibility at home and abroad to occupy her maternal attention for the next hundred years. If the British nation has not murdered enough, no nation on God's earth has.²²

Two months later he was warning that 'the British Empire will come to grief unless it changes its method of dealing with aboriginal

‘races’. Denouncing the cunning, lies, ‘abominable greed’, and injustice of European colonizers, he prophesied:

The day is coming when Africans will speak for themselves . . . The day is breaking, and . . . the despised African, whose only crime is his colour, will yet give an account of himself . . . We think it no crime for Africans to look with suspicion upon the European, who has stolen a part of [their] country, and deluged it with rum and powder, under the cover of civilisation.²³

Celestine Edwards worked himself to death. Advised by Sir Andrew Clark of the London Hospital, where he had enrolled as a medical student, to lay aside all study and to travel if possible, he chose to combine travel and work by undertaking a punishing lecture tour. In Bristol, on 3 July 1893, he spoke on ‘Lynch Law, or American Atrocities’; a week later 1,200 people heard him speak in London on the same subject; a month later he was in Liverpool speaking on ‘Blacks and Whites in America’; in September, after a visit to Plymouth, there were meetings in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Liverpool again. In November he thought nothing of travelling from Ashton-under-Lyne to London, lecturing the same night, returning north to Huddersfield next day and lecturing there at night.²⁴ He started travelling by night mail so as to cram in still more speaking engagements. After spending the winter on the south coast he was stumping the country again when spring came. Before he fell ill he had been a commanding figure on the platform, hardly more than an inch short of six feet tall, with a joyous laugh that people remembered him by, ‘full of life, full of energy, full of boyish enthusiasm; his eyes flashing as no English eyes can, and his big, brawny frame glowing with health’. Now a colleague heard him coughing half the night in the next-door hotel bedroom.²⁵ In a desperate effort to get better he sailed for Dominica. Two months later, on 25 July 1894, he died there, in his brother’s arms. The Christian Evidence movement mourned a ‘beloved chief, friend, and illustrious champion’.²⁶ One obituarist wrote: ‘He was proud of his colour and his people. He lived not for himself.’²⁷

Sylvester Williams and the African Association

That the threads of emergent Pan-Africanism were at last drawn together, and a Pan-African conference convened in London in July

1900, was due above all to the work and vision of yet another long-neglected pioneer: the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams. He was born on 19 February 1869, in the village of Arouca, about ten miles east of Port of Spain, and was the eldest of five children of a Barbadian wheelwright who had settled in Trinidad. An able student, he qualified as a school-teacher at the early age of 17 and was put in charge of a school a year later. But teachers were poorly paid in Trinidad, and Williams went to New York at the age of 22. After two years in the United States he entered Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1893, to study law. Three years later he came to London, enrolling at King's College and making ends meet by lecturing for the Church of England Temperance Society and the National Thrift Society. In 1897 he joined three other Trinidadian law students at Gray's Inn. While reading for the bar he met and fell in love with an Englishwoman slightly older than himself: Agnes Powell, daughter of a Royal Marines officer who fiercely opposed the match. The couple were married in 1898 and their first child, Henry Francis Sylvester, was born in the following year.

Besides lecturing on Trinidad – he denounced crown colony rule as a 'heartless system . . . a synonym for racial contempt'²⁸ – Williams led a deputation of Trinidadians living in London to meet MPs, becoming the first person of African descent to speak under the House of Commons roof. Of more lasting importance was his initiative in founding the African Association in 1897. Its aims, in the year of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, were:

To encourage a feeling of unity to facilitate friendly intercourse among Africans in general; to promote and protect the interests of all subjects claiming African descent, wholly or in part, in British Colonies and other places, especially in Africa, by circulating accurate information on all subjects affecting their rights and privileges as subjects of the British Empire, by direct appeals to the Imperial and Local Governments.²⁹

Williams was the association's secretary. Its president was the Revd Henry Mason Joseph, an Antiguan, and its treasurer was Mrs E.V.Kinloch, an African woman from Natal married to a Scotsman. She campaigned with Williams against the maltreatment of black

people in South Africa and went back home in 1898.* At a meeting of members and friends on 11 January 1898, Williams said the association wanted to be as representative as possible, 'so that its information shall be direct and first hand from the various parts of the Empire', and suggested that branch societies should be encouraged in the colonies and protectorates.³¹ 'This promising society . . . appears to be making steady progress', wrote the journal of the Aborigines' Protection Society in March 1898. 'Frequent meetings of its increasing number of members are held, at which information is exchanged on important questions affecting the welfare of Africans, not only on their own continent, but also in the West Indies and elsewhere.'³² The association, in fact, acted as an African and West Indian lobby. In March 1898 it sent the colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, a memorial 'on the distress in the West Indies',³³ and seven months later it petitioned him asking for the interests of Africans to be safeguarded in the new Rhodesian constitution.³⁴

The Pan-African Conference (1900) and after

Even before the African Association was formed, Williams had conceived the idea of a world conference of black people, and in 1898 a call for such a conference was issued. On 19 March an association meeting decided to issue a circular, signed by Williams and Henry Joseph, announcing a conference in two years' time 'in order to take steps to influence public opinion on existing proceedings and conditions affecting the welfare of the Natives in the various parts of the Empire, viz., SOUTH AFRICA, WEST AFRICA and the B[ritish]. WEST INDIES'.³⁵ After discussions with leaders of black opinion, in London on other business (including Bishop James T. Holly, an old colleague of Delany; Bishop James Johnson, a friend of Blyden; and the American educator Booker T. Washington), the scope of the proposed conference was broadened to cover 'the treatment of native races under European and American rule', and specifically

* Vice-president of the African Association was the Sierra Leonean T.J. Thompson; assistant secretary was the Trinidadian A.C. Durham. Other leading members were Durham's brothers Ernest and Frederick, both barristers; Antiguan Frederick Ellis Bass, a graduate of Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tennessee; the Revd C.W. Farquhar, Antiguan schoolmaster ordained a deacon in the Church of England; Richard E. Phipps, Trinidadian law student; and Dr Ernest Jones Hayford, elder brother of the prominent Gold Coast lawyer, author, and nationalist J.E. Casely Hayford.³⁰

those in South Africa, West Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.³⁶

The term 'Pan-African' seems to have been first used in 1899, though it is not clear who first used it.³⁷ By April 1900 the Pan-African Conference committee had adopted the motto 'Light and Liberty'. This committee included Williams as general secretary; Joseph as chairman; the Revd Thomas L. Johnson, a West African, as vice-chairman; and the Trinidadian law student Richard E. Phipps as secretary for the West Indies.

Williams told a gathering of delegates at the Reform Club on 6 July that the conference would be 'the first occasion upon which black men would assemble in England to speak for themselves and endeavour to influence public opinion in their favour'. The conference, he added, would consider the position of black people in South Africa and must see to it that their interests were not overlooked in any settlement of the Boer War.³⁸ It was in reports of this meeting that the British press first used the term 'Pan-African'.³⁹ At a meeting of the African Association a week before the conference an engrossed memorial was presented to Bishop James Johnson, who was about to leave for Lagos. In this document the association held that it was time for black people to develop their own talent and energy. The position of Africans, 'either at home or under the flags of the known powers', was not reassuring. Their efforts should be directed to the education of the young so as to bring forth the 'prolific possibilities of the race'. Aware of the distortions of history as presented by white writers, and of the need to redress the balance, the association believed that black people should develop 'our own chroniclers' and set up 'our own libraries and organizations'.⁴⁰

The plenary sessions of the conference were held in Westminster Town Hall on 23, 24, and 25 July 1900. Never before, said Williams afterwards, had black people 'assailed London with a conference'.⁴¹ There were about 37 delegates and about ten other participants and observers.⁴² The chair was taken by the most distinguished participant, Bishop Alexander Walters, a leader of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in the United States and president of the National Afro-American Council. The vice-chairmen were representatives of independent African states: Frederick Johnson, former attorney-general of Liberia, and the Haitian Benito Sylvain, aide-de-camp to the Ethiopian emperor. Also on the platform was Mrs Jane Rose Roberts, elderly widow of Liberia's first president.

In his opening address on 'The Trials and Tribulations of the Coloured Race in America', Bishop Walters said that for the first time in history black people had gathered from all parts of the globe to discuss and improve the condition of their race, to assert their rights and organize so that they might take an equal place among nations. The first paper, read by C.W. French of St Kitts, on 'Conditions Favouring a High Standard of African Humanity', demanded that black people be recognized as human beings enjoying equal rights with white people. Miss Anna H. Jones from Kansas, in a paper on 'The Preservation of Race Equality', said it was important to preserve the identity of the black race and develop its artistic talents. In his speech of welcome the bishop of London, Mandell Creighton,⁴³ obliquely criticized the ruling ideas of the epoch by referring to 'the benefits of self-government' which Britain must confer on 'other races . . . as soon as possible'.

Sylvain's paper that evening, on 'The Necessary Concord to be Established between Native Races and European Colonists', pulled no punches in its attack on colonialism. It had been right, he said, to choose the metropolis of the British Empire as their meeting-place, for the British people were responsible for the anti-liberal reaction that had characterized colonial policy over the preceding 15 years, and the British government had tolerated the most frightful deeds of the colonizing companies. Before many years had passed, however, every colonial power would have to recognize the rights of the indigenous peoples. These peoples must no longer be considered as serfs. No human power could halt Africans' social and political development. A Latin teacher from Washington, Mrs Anna J. Cooper, brought the first day's proceedings to a close with a paper on 'The Negro Problem in America'.

Next day the Liberian Frederick Johnson opened a discussion on 'The Progress of Our People in the light of Current History'. John E. Quinlan from St Lucia said British capitalists seemed determined to enslave black people again, especially in South Africa; William Meyer, Trinidadian medical student at Edinburgh University and one of the two delegates from the Afro-West Indian Literary Society there, attacked pseudo-scientific racism for 'trying to prove that negroes were worthless and depraved persons who had no right to live'; and Richard Phipps complained of discrimination against black people in the Trinidadian civil service: they got the worst jobs and were passed over in promotion. D.E. Tobias, an American, led a discussion on 'Africa, the Sphinx of History, in the Light of Unsolved Problems'. Dr W.E.B. DuBois said the fact that

black people could nowhere maximize their potential was not merely an injustice and hindrance to them but hindered human evolution. The Revd Henry Smith, who lived in London, forecast a grand and glorious future for Africans and warned against letting differences in the various shades of colour of black people interfere with their progress – they should all work together.

On the last day Bishop Walters thanked the liberal and philanthropic elements in Britain and America who had stood up for black people in their countries, and George James Christian from Dominica led a discussion on the subject: 'Organized Plunder *v.* Human Progress Has Made Our Race its Battlefield'. In the past, he said, Africans had been kidnapped from their land, and in South Africa and Rhodesia slavery was being revived in the form of forced labour. Closing the discussion, Bishop Walters said their object was to secure moral, political, and civil rights for black people. They had the force of numbers on their side. The conference was just the beginning of the work, and it meant that black people throughout the world would organize for their own betterment.⁴⁴

Then the conference turned to some practical tasks. The African Association was merged into a new Pan-African Association. Bishop Walters was president; the Revd Henry B. Brown, a Canadian, vice-president; Williams, general secretary; Dr R.J. Colenso, son of Bishop Colenso of Natal, treasurer; Sylvain, general delegate for Africa. Two of those elected to the new association's executive committee were Samuel Coleridge-Taylor the composer and Frederick J. Loudin, former director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers (see pp. 440–1 below). A third, John Richard Archer, was later mayor of Battersea; we shall come back to him presently. The other three were Henry Francis Downing, a former member of the United States consular service; Mrs Cooper, the Washington teacher; and an Englishwoman, Mrs Jane Cobden Unwin, wife of the publisher T. Fisher Unwin. Officers of several overseas branches were appointed, and the conference defined the new association's aims thus:

1. To secure to Africans throughout the world true civil and political rights.
2. To meliorate the conditions of our brothers on the continent of Africa, America and other parts of the world.
3. To promote efforts to secure effective legislation and encourage our people in educational, industrial and commercial enterprise.

4. To foster the production of writing and statistics relating to our people everywhere.
5. To raise funds for forwarding these purposes.

The conference unanimously adopted an 'Address to the Nations of the World', to be sent to the heads of those states in which people of African descent were living. Signed by Walters, Williams, DuBois, and the Revd Henry B. Brown, this document contained the lapidary phrase, 'The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour-line', which DuBois was to use three years later in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. 'Let not the cloak of Christian missionary enterprise', the address declared, 'be allowed in the future, as so often in the past, to hide the ruthless economic exploitation and political downfall of less developed nations, whose chief fault has been reliance on the plighted troth of the Christian Church.' Demanding an end to colour and race prejudice, the address called on Britain in particular to give, 'as soon as practicable, the rights of responsible government to the black colonies of Africa and the West Indies'. (Four years earlier, colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain had written privately that black people in the West Indies were 'totally unfit for representative institutions'.)⁴⁵

A petition was sent to Queen Victoria on the situation of black people in South Africa and Rhodesia, drawing attention to forced labour, the indenture system whereby black men, women, and children were placed in legalized bondage to white colonists, the pass system, and various kinds of segregation. To this petition the colonial secretary at length sent a bland reply, promising that her Majesty's government would not 'overlook the interests and welfare of the native races'.⁴⁶

The conference was reported in the leading London newspapers. The *Westminster Gazette* observed that it 'marks the initiation of a remarkable movement in history: the negro is at last awake to the potentialities of his future', and quoted Williams's words to a reporter:

I felt that it was time some effort was made to have us recognised as a people, and so enable us to take our position in the world. We were being legislated for without our sanction – without a voice in the laws that were made to govern us. My idea of bringing about some alteration in this respect was confined in the first place to the British Colonies, but the scheme developed into a Pan-African one. Our object now is to secure throughout the world the same facilities and

privileges for the black as the white man enjoys . . . There is an attempt in the world to-day to re-enslave the negro race. Especially is this the case in South Africa. We feel that we must bring our whole forces together to prevent that.⁴⁷

The press coverage contained little comment, except in W.T.Stead's *Review of Reviews*. Stead, one of the few journalists of the day who could rise above the prevailing jingoism and imperial arrogance, called the 'Address to the Nations of the World' 'a sign of the times of which we shall all do well to take note'.⁴⁸

Those who gave financial help to the conference included the most distinguished figure in Britain's small Indian community: the ex-MP Dadabhai Naoroji. According to Williams's biographer Owen Mathurin, Naoroji 'saw some affinity between his work for the Indian people and what Williams was trying to do for Africans at home and abroad', and Naoroji's work in and out of Parliament had 'inspired Williams to seek to do the same for his own people'.⁴⁹ Naoroji's support for the 1900 Pan-African Conference is the earliest recorded instance of Afro-Asian solidarity in Britain – of practical help from the Asian community to their brothers and sisters of African descent here.

After the conference Williams went to Jamaica, Trinidad, and the United States to set up branches of the Pan-African Association. He was abroad for more than half of 1901, and while he was away there was some manoeuvring against him. It seems to have been led by the treasurer, Dr R.J.Colenso, who dissolved the organization on the pretext of lack of funds. When Williams came back to London he tried to revive it, but the momentum was spent. All the same, Williams did manage to launch a journal called *The Pan-African* in October 1901. It was designed to spread information 'concerning the interests of the African and his descendants in the British Empire' and to be 'the mouthpiece of the millions of Africans and their descendants'. Declaring that 'little or nothing is known of the educated British Negro', the editorial in the first issue expressed the conviction 'that no other but a Negro can represent the Negro', adding that 'the times demand the presence of that Negro to serve the deserving cause of a people the most despised and ill-used to-day'.⁵⁰ A woolly message of support from the Labour leader Keir Hardie claimed that 'apart from a few interested parties of the South African millionaire type, the wrongs done to your people under British rule are more due to ignorance than to any desire to act unjustly' and advised 'temperate yet strenuous action' to redress

those wrongs.⁵¹ *The Pan-African* was short-lived; probably only one issue appeared.

The Pan-African Association's rapid decline is not hard to understand. As Mathurin points out, 'organizations formed by colonials in a metropolitan capital tend to fluctuate in strength and activity with the ebb and flow of residents'.⁵² Williams claimed in 1901 that the association had 50 working members – there were 150 white sympathizers, admitted to honorary membership only⁵³ – but few of the 50 black members were permanent residents and most were students. Nor could Williams devote his entire time to the organization. He resumed his legal studies, was called to the bar in June 1902, and became probably the first barrister of African descent to practise in Britain.⁵⁴ He went to South Africa a few months later to defend black people in the courts, in the teeth of bitter prejudice and boycott by the Cape Law Society.⁵⁵ When he came back to Britain in 1905 he continued to work on behalf of black South Africans. In the following year he became the only black member of the committee of the League of Universal Brotherhood and Native Races Association. Little is known about this body except that its motto was 'United to Aid', its symbol was a black hand and a white hand clasped in greeting, and its vice-president was the Revd F.B.Meyer, head of the Free Church Council.⁵⁶

In November 1906 Williams, who had joined the Fabian Society, became one of the first two persons of African descent to be elected to public office in Britain when he won a seat on Marylebone borough council as a 'Progressive' (i.e. Liberal-Labour) candidate, polling 701 votes in the Church Street ward. After visiting Liberia in 1908 – the British consul sent home three confidential dispatches in two weeks denouncing him – Williams suddenly decided, for unknown reasons, to go back to Trinidad with his family. He was building a successful legal practice there when he fell ill towards the end of 1910. On 26 March 1911 he died in hospital.⁵⁷ His fifth child was born five days later.

Dusé Mohamed Ali

The ideas of Pan-Africanism inspired the activities of another vivid but, again, little-remembered personality in this country: Dusé Mohamed Ali.

His origins are something of a mystery. He claimed to be the son of an Egyptian officer and his Sudanese wife. He was born, he said, in 1866 or 1867, was sent to Britain as a boy of nine or ten to be educated, and never returned to Egypt after his father was killed in

battle in 1882. Various doubts have been cast on this story and Ian Duffield, examining the evidence, draws attention to the fact that Ali had not even a smattering of Arabic. On the other hand, Duffield emphasizes that Ali never wavered in his claim to be of Egypto-Sudanese parentage 'even when it caused him great inconvenience (as when it allowed the British authorities to register him as technically an enemy alien during the First World War)'; that Egyptians in London seem never to have challenged his claim 'and even accepted him as, for some purposes, a leader of their community'; and, above all, that 'he was undoubtedly black, and identified with other blacks'.⁵⁸ Between 1883 and 1921 he lived mainly in Britain, earning his bread mostly as a penny-a-line journalist and ill-paid touring actor. He was often desperately poor. In 1909–11 he was a fairly regular contributor to A.R. Orage's *New Age*. In 1911 he published a hastily written anti-imperialist book, *In the Land of the Pharaohs*, 21 passages in which were lifted without acknowledgment from writings by Theodore Rothstein, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and the Earl of Cromer.⁵⁹ But to many of his readers the plagiarism mattered little or not at all. Ali was defending black rights and forecasting the downfall of the British Empire, and his book had a lasting impact in the United States and West Africa.

Ali's chief contribution to the Pan-African movement, and to the struggle against imperialism and racism, was the *African Times and Orient Review*. He launched this magazine in July 1912, in partnership with the Sierra Leonean businessman and journalist John Eldred Taylor,⁶⁰ and kept it alive, with certain gaps, until the end of 1920. This was the first political journal produced by and for black people ever published in Britain. It was in a sense a by-product of the Universal Races Congress that had been held in London the previous year. Attended by DuBois, Gandhi – then leader of the Indian minority in South Africa – and several African representatives, this gathering was emphatically 'not a Pan-African event but rather a well-meant sentimental attempt to contribute towards a better relationship between the various races by means of personal contact and scholarly discussion'.⁶¹ Where the congress had been sentimental, the *African Times and Orient Review* was militant. The congress had clearly demonstrated the need, wrote Ali in the first issue, for 'a Pan-Oriental, Pan-African journal at the seat of the British Empire which would lay the aims, desires, and intentions of the Black, Brown, and Yellow Races – within and without the Empire – at the throne of Cæsar'. For 'the voices of millions of Britain's enlightened dark races are never heard'. Their capacity

was underrated. They were victims of 'systematic injustice'. And the first issue gave a shameful example of this injustice when it described the public flogging, at Zaria in northern Nigeria the previous February, of two African railway clerks named Taylor and Hall, who had failed to prostrate themselves before a third-class British Resident named Laing. (The public flogging of Africans in the nude, women as well as men, on the orders of British administrators in Africa was 'so common' in the early twentieth century that 'only the more flagrant examples . . . attracted much attention'.)⁶²

'A Word to our Brothers' in the same issue told black people plainly: 'Your day is coming. Your place in the Sun has been and will come again . . . The future of Africa, the future of India, will not be decided in the Chanceries of Europe, but upon the hills of India and the plains of Africa.'⁶³ And when the First World War began Ali did not mince his words (though, once Britain entered the war, prudence clearly prevented his being so outspoken again). He wrote in the issue dated 4 August 1914: 'All the combatants, the conquerors and the conquered alike, will be exhausted by the struggle, and will require years for their recovery, and during that time much may be done. Watch and wait! It may be that the non-European races will profit by European disaster.'⁶⁴

As Duffield points out, the quality of the *African Times and Orient Review* was consistently high. It built up an international circulation; it was read by black intellectuals in Africa, north America, and the West Indies; it preached Afro-Asian solidarity. Not least, the paper 'received the backhanded tribute of being disliked and rather feared by the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office and the India Office'.⁶⁵ Geiss justly calls it 'a mine of information' which 'diligently unearthed abuses of colonial rule in the British colonies and passed on information to Labour M.P.s who asked embarrassing questions in the House of Commons'.⁶⁶

One of the contributors to Ali's journal was a young Jamaican called Marcus Garvey, later to become the first black leader to inspire millions of Afro-Americans with pride in their race. Another who made his literary début in the *African Times and Orient Review* was the Ghanaian philosopher, lawyer, and nationalist Kobina Sekyi (William Essuman-Gwira Sekyi), then a 20-year-old student, who graduated from London University with honours in philosophy in 1914 and was called to the bar five years later. Garvey and Sekyi were two of the many black visitors to London who made Ali's tiny Fleet Street office their 'general meeting place and informal headquarters'.⁶⁷

In 1921 Dusé Mohamed Ali went to the United States, where he lived for the next ten years. In 1931 he settled in Nigeria, where he launched the *Comet*, a weekly news magazine which came to play an important part in the nationalist movement (and, in 1937–8, serialized his autobiography). He died in Lagos in 1945.

John Richard Archer and the African Progress Union

The first person of African descent to hold civic office in Britain. The first British-born black councillor, alderman, and mayor. The first black person to become an election agent for a constituency Labour Party. The first British-born black person to represent his country at an international conference abroad. John Richard Archer's list of 'firsts' is impressive indeed. 'A significant force in both the Pan-Africanist and Battersea labour movements for over a quarter of a century',⁶⁸ he saw no conflict between these two spheres of activity. Nor, it seems, did his colleagues in either. He was a byword in Battersea for diligence in the performance of municipal duties; the list of public offices he held is huge; but when he died the leader of the local Labour Party singled out also for praise his ardent work 'for the benefit of the coloured races'.⁶⁹

He was born on 8 June 1863, in a tiny house in Blake Street, Liverpool, a few minutes' walk from Lime Street. Richard Archer, his father, was a ship's steward who hailed from Barbados; Mary Theresa, his mother, whose maiden name was Burns, was Irish. Almost nothing is known of his early life. A nervous breakdown in his youth obliged him to give up the study of medicine. He claimed to have gone round the world three times – presumably as a seaman – and he may have lived for a time in north America and the West Indies. He was in his late twenties when he and his wife, a black Canadian, arrived in Battersea and set up house at 55 Brynmaer Road, at the south end of Battersea Park. Archer earned his living as a photographer, with a studio in Battersea Park Road; he seems to have been a successful one, for his work won many prizes. He started to read for the bar, but political activity took precedence over his studies, which he at length abandoned.

In those days Battersea was London's most radical borough. It was the base for such pioneers as John Burns and Tom Mann, Charlotte Despard and Mary Gray. Its council opposed the Boer War as imperialist and criticized the lavish expenditure over the crowning of Edward VII. A supporter of Burns, who was Battersea's MP from 1892 to 1918, Archer was first elected to the borough council in November 1906, as one of the six councillors for the

Latchmere ward, where he topped the poll with 1,051 votes. He lost his seat in 1909 but was re-elected three years later. On 10 November 1913, when he was elected mayor of Battersea by 40 votes to 39 in a contest with a West End tailor, the borough had a population of 167,000 and the council's annual income from rates was just over £400,000.

For a couple of weeks before the election the prospect of one of its boroughs having a black mayor gave 'a thrill to novelty-loving London', as one paper put it.⁷⁰ The *Daily Mail*, not knowing or not caring that Archer was a Liverpudlian, referred to his 'keen contest with an Englishman'.⁷¹ The *Daily Chronicle* seemed surprised to find that Archer's 'well-dressed and well-groomed appearance' was 'that of a busy and prosperous business man'.⁷² There was opposition from proto-fascists like the anonymous 'True Progressive' who wrote in a local paper: 'It is not meet that the white man should be governed and controlled by a man of colour. It has always been that the white man ruled and it must always be so. If not, good-bye to the prestige of Great Britain.'⁷³ Archer's supporters said he was 'a most useful public man, and a man of whom Battersea has reason to be proud'; he was 'a clever speaker' and 'a man of strong intellect'.⁷⁴ There was much excitement at the council meeting and a large crowd waited outside to hear the result.⁷⁵ The newly elected mayor told the council: 'You have made history to-night . . . Battersea has done many things in the past, but the greatest thing it has done is to show that it has no racial prejudice, and that it recognises a man for the work he has done.'⁷⁶

Archer received letters of congratulation from leading members of the black community in the United States, and his mayoralty was featured in DuBois's journal *The Crisis*, with photographs of Archer and Mrs Archer in their robes of office. *The Crisis* told its readers that Archer 'fears no man, and brooks no insult because of the race to which he is proud to belong'. Archer wrote to an American friend:

Last week I attended a great function at the Guildhall when the twenty-eight London mayors were present with the lord mayor. It filled my heart with joy to walk in the procession of mayors in that old historic building – the first time that one of our race has done so as mayor.⁷⁷

Like most of his Progressive fellow-councillors, Archer moved to the left in his political views during the First World War, and when he defended his Latchmere ward seat in 1919 he did so as a Labour

candidate. Once again he topped the poll. In December of that year he helped in the election campaign of Charlotte Despard, radical, socialist, feminist, and pre-war suffragette.⁷⁸ Three years later he gave up his council seat so that he could concentrate on winning back for Labour the constituency of North Battersea, lost to a Coalition Liberal in the 'khaki election' of 1919. He now became election agent for Shapurji Saklatvala, a Parsee and a member of both Communist Party and Labour Party in those days when dual membership was still possible. Through skilful negotiation Archer succeeded in having Saklatvala adopted as North Battersea's Labour candidate. He did so by persuading Battersea Trades Council, the sponsoring body, to pledge its support for the Labour Party constitution and to withdraw opposition to the MP's membership of the Parliamentary Labour Party. This compromise made Saklatvala the only communist candidate, in the general elections of 1922, 1923, and 1924, not to have a Labour Party opponent; as we shall see, he sat as Labour MP in 1922–3, lost his seat in the 1923 election, and regained it in 1924, sitting as a communist MP until 1929. But Archer, who had become an alderman in 1925, found it impossible after the General Strike to co-operate with an increasingly Moscow-dominated Communist Party, and he gave up his business to become secretary of Battersea Labour Party and agent for the candidate who in 1929 won North Battersea back for Labour.

Archer returned to the council in 1931. He topped the poll in the Nine Elms ward and became deputy Labour leader on the council. When he died suddenly in the following July, colleagues looked back on an extraordinary record of service to the local community. At various times he served on the health, works, finance, and valuation committees of the council, the committee responsible for baths and wash-houses, and those concerned with unemployment, health, and tuberculosis care. His record of attendance at both committee and full council meetings was outstanding.⁷⁹ He was a governor of Battersea Polytechnic, president of Nine Elms Swimming Club, chairman of the Whitley Staff Committee, and a trustee of the borough charities. He served on Wandsworth Board of Guardians, and it was said that there never was a case in which he did not try to get more generous treatment for the applicant: 'The poor had no better friend.'⁸⁰ He was active in securing a minimum wage of 32s. a week for council workers and 30s. for those employed by the Board of Guardians.

Amid all these everyday tasks, Archer's devotion to the cause of Pan-Africanism was no less consistent. When the African Progress

Union was formed in London in 1918 he was chosen as president, and he held the post for three years. Members, mostly students but with a sprinkling of business people, came 'from various parts of Africa, the West Indies, British Guiana, Honduras and America'. The Union's aims were 'to promote the general welfare of Africans and Afro-Peoples'; to set up a social and residential club in London as a 'home from home'; to spread 'knowledge of the history and achievements of Africans and Afro-Peoples past and present'; and to create and maintain 'a public sentiment in favour of brotherhood in its broadest sense'.⁸¹ The Union 'saw itself as a Pan-Negro club linking Afro-Americans with other African peoples'.⁸² Dusé Mohamed Ali was a foundation member. So were the Gold Coast merchant Robert Broadhurst, a man in his sixties who became the Union's secretary; and Edmund Fitzgerald Fredericks from British Guiana, who later became a member of the Georgetown legislative council and chaired the colony's Negro Progress Convention.

Another foundation member of the African Progress Union was John Alcindor, a Trinidadian physician practising in London. Born in Port of Spain in 1873, Alcindor made his home in Britain after graduating from the University of Edinburgh medical school in 1899 with first-class honours in three subjects. He was one of the two delegates from Edinburgh's Afro-West Indian Literary Society to the Pan-African Conference in 1900. From 1907 until his death in 1924 he was one of the borough of Paddington's four district medical officers – and as recently as 1981 he was still remembered with respect by old people in Paddington when Jeffrey P. Green interviewed them. Known as 'the black doctor of Paddington', Alcindor gave free medical treatment to those too poor to pay. His family recall how, more than once, he came home, took his dinner, and left the house with it, remarking: 'My patient needs feeding, not doctoring.' In 1911 he married Minnie Martin, a white Londoner; two of their three sons are living. In 1921 Alcindor succeeded Archer as president of the African Progress Union, and in the same year, as we shall see in chapter 10, he played a prominent part in the second Pan-African Congress.⁸³

Other leading supporters of the African Progress Union included John Alexander Barbour-James from British Guiana, whose house in Acton was a meeting-place for black visitors to Britain; Barbour-James's daughter Muriel; E.P. Bruyning, another Guyanan; Felix Hercules from Trinidad (for whom see pp. 313–16 below); the Trinidadians Audrey Jeffers, Sylvia Acham-Chen, and Alphonso Luke; Alfred Adderley from the Bahamas; Kwaminah F. Tandoh

from the Gold Coast; and John Eldred Taylor, the businessman and journalist from Sierra Leone who had helped Dusé Mohamed Ali launch the *African Times and Orient Review* in 1912 and was now proprietor of the *African Telegraph*, also published in London.⁸⁴

In 1919 Archer went to Paris as British delegate to the first Pan-African Congress. At the second Pan-African Congress, in London in 1921, he chaired a session on colonial freedom, called on the British government to heed the colonial people's growing political demands, and introduced Saklatvala, who made a declaration of solidarity, on behalf of the Indian national movement, with the 'Coloured World'.⁸⁵

But Archer's most important single contribution as a Pan-Africanist was a remarkable speech he made at the African Progress Union's inaugural meeting a few weeks after the end of the First World War. (For the full text of this speech, see appendix E, pp. 410–16.) It was remarkable alike for its simplicity and its militancy:

The people in this country are sadly ignorant with reference to the darker races, and our object is to show to them that we have given up the idea of becoming hewers of wood and drawers of water, that we claim our rightful place within this Empire. That if we are good enough to be brought to fight the wars of the country we are good enough to receive the benefits of the country. One of the objects of this association is to demand – not ask, demand; it will be 'demand' all the time that I am your President. I am not asking for anything, I am out demanding.⁸⁶

And the room rang with cheers.

Black workers and soldiers

John Richard Archer was speaking on behalf of a black community that had been transformed by the war. It had grown in numbers; it had grown in self-confidence; above all, its expectations had grown.

Before the war, black students and Pan-African activists had been a relatively fortunate minority within the community. The majority of black people in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lived very hard lives indeed. The largest group, in terms of occupation, were seamen. Dumped from tramp steamers or attracted by the prospect of casual work, black seamen had begun to find a berth in Cardiff by the 1870s, when the south

Wales coalfield was growing rapidly and Cardiff, Newport, and Barry were beginning to flourish as coal ports.¹ By 1881 Cardiff had a big enough floating population of black seamen for a Sailors' Rest to be instituted for them.² Thirty years later, Cardiff was second only to London in the proportion of its population that was foreign-born, and about 700 of these were Africans and West Indians.³ Laid off in Cardiff, Newport, Barry, London, Liverpool, Hull, Tyneside, or Glasgow, black seamen found it hard to get another ship, harder still to find work ashore. Most white seamen rejected them as shipmates; white dockers, too, refused to work alongside them. Having spent the small sums they had been paid off with, having pawned any spare clothes and other belongings, destitute seamen tramped from port to port, desperate for work. Their quest was endless and almost hopeless. Help from compatriots and parish hand-outs kept them from starving; but they often went hungry. From time to time the Colonial Office would repatriate unemployed seamen, but in the case of West Indians the authorities in the islands they came from often refused to let them go back.

At length this state of affairs led to a parliamentary inquiry. The Committee on Distressed Colonial and Indian Subjects reported in 1910. One witness told the committee that about three in five of the distressed blacks were seafaring men; another, that as many as 50 distressed West Indians came to his notice in London every year; a third, that 'men of their own race domiciled in London are often kind to them'. About a quarter of the destitute black people were said to be 'student adventurers'. There were also a number of people brought to Britain as servants ('butlers and nurses' from the West Indies), who had left their employers because of bad treatment, much as their eighteenth-century predecessors had done. One witness warned the committee that 'the desperate Indians of the student type not infrequently lend themselves as tools in the hands of the dangerous agitators settled in this country as well as on the continent'. Someone from the Colonial Office's West African Department said the Africans who called there for help were 'generally wasters . . . probably people who would not stay in the workhouse, but simply go out into the streets to sponge upon anybody they can.' And he added: 'It might be a useful thing to have some compulsory power of repatriating people like that.'⁴

The outbreak of war in 1914 brought dramatic changes for black workers in Britain. Now there was well-paid work for them to do. Their help was needed for the war effort. Black labourers were made welcome in the munition and chemical factories. Black sea-

men, replacing men needed by the navy, were made welcome in the merchant service. By the end of the war there were about 20,000 black people in Britain.⁵

But there was change of another kind. Black men were also needed as cannon-fodder. 'If we are good enough to fight the wars of this country' was Archer's phrase in 1918. And they had been. Although the War Office decided to confine the 3rd and 4th battalions of the West India Regiment to ammunition-carrying and labour services in France – 'black Bermudans and West Indians were never allowed to be actively engaged in the fighting on the western front'⁶ – troops from the West Indies and Africa fought bravely and well in many other theatres of war, including campaigns against German forces in Africa, just as Indian troops fought bravely and well in France and elsewhere.⁷

In 1917 the *Daily Mirror* published pictures of the Gold Coast Regiment's black machine-gunners, who had 'shown marked ability . . . in fights against the Huns'.⁸ In the same year an entire book, published in London, was devoted to black soldiers' contribution to the British war effort. Written by the former colonial administrator Sir Harry Johnston, friend of Rhodes and Stanley, it was called *The Black Man's Part in the War*. It told how commanders had praised black troops for their 'pluck, gallantry and devotion', and for the tenacity with which they stood up to heavy machine-gun fire. It even had a chapter, honeyed with promises, on what the British Empire must do for the 'dark races' after the war.⁹ Just as the war took a huge toll of black seamen – from Cardiff alone, 1,000 were killed at sea, and another 400, rescued after their ships were sunk, went back to the port to die of the effects of exposure¹⁰ – so a large number of black soldiers were wounded, crippled for life, or killed in battle. The British West Indies Regiment alone (not to be confused with the West India Regiment), whose rank and file were almost entirely black troops, lost 185 killed or died of wounds and 1,071 who died of sickness; a further 697 were wounded.¹¹

Many wounded and crippled black soldiers were brought back to Britain for treatment in military hospitals. Many were decorated as heroes. Sixteen members of the West African Frontier Force (whose white officers customarily referred to their rank and file as 'the Apes')¹² and the King's African Rifles were awarded the DCM.¹³ The British West Indies Regiment had 5 DSOs, 9 MCs, 2 MBEs, 8 DCMs, 37 MMs, and 49 Mentions in Dispatches.¹⁴ Many black soldiers were demobilized in Britain. So, by the end of the war, Britain's black population was not only bigger than ever

before but also included a proportion of seasoned fighting men, trained to defend themselves against attack. Soon they would have to.

A few weeks before the end of the First World War, about 2,000 wounded soldiers were patients in the Belmont Road Military Auxiliary Hospital, Liverpool. About 50 of them were black men. Most of these were in the British West Indies Regiment, and most had one or both feet blown off. Relations between black and white patients were good – until some newcomers arrived. These were white soldiers who had served in South Africa. When the newcomers started taunting the black soldiers there was a fight in which a sledgehammer was flung at a group of black men, two of whom were legless. When black soldiers were taunted in the concert-room, two decided to leave and, as they were hobbling out on their crutches, a white soldier called: 'Make room for the swine to pass.' The concert-room was then put out of bounds to black troops. A rumour went round that the ban had been lifted, and a legless black sergeant called John Demerette, known as 'Demetrius', crawled towards the guard with the intention of asking if the rumour were true. The guard seized him and threw him into a cell. His shouts brought ten crippled black soldiers to his aid. The cry went round, 'The niggers are fighting the guard.' Between 400 and 500 white soldiers went into battle against 50 black soldiers, attacking them with crutches and sticks and throwing pots, pans, and kettles at them. A white nurse, knocked down in the *mêlée*, went into shock and later died of pneumonia. Some of the white soldiers, to their credit, defended their black comrades as best they could. A contemporary report said:

Some of the British Tommies who had fought side by side with these coloured soldiers in the trenches . . . took sides with the coloured soldiers . . . When the Provost Marshal arrived on the scene with a number of military police to restore order, there were many white soldiers seen standing over crippled black limbless soldiers, and protecting them with their sticks and crutches from the furious onslaught of the other white soldiers until order was restored.¹⁵

London newspapers blamed the black soldiers for the rioting, but a War Office inquiry found otherwise.¹⁶