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Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre. *Cosmopolitan Nationalism in the Victorian Empire: Ireland, India and the Politics of Alfred Webb.* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. xiii + 229 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-22085-0.

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Untangling Ireland's Imperial Webb

In *Cosmopolitan Nationalism in the Victorian Empire: Ireland, India, and the Politics of Alfred Webb*, Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre engages several historiographies at once–the nature of nationalism, the internal dynamics of the Home Rule movement, the importance of personal connections to achieving political ends, the interrelationships of constituent parts of the British Empire, and the place of Ireland in the wider world. While the final two of these may strike some as redundant, they are, in fact, distinct though related issues. The empire was, as Regan-Lefebvre demonstrates, one conduit through which at least some Irish men and women understood their place in the world and sought to influence world developments, but it was not the only one such conduit.

The author builds her study around a single person's career–that of Alfred Webb (1834-1908), long known as an important, if eccentric, member of the Irish Home Rule movement. A Dublin Quaker and printer, Webb came from a family of committed social activists–his parents, R. D. and Hannah, were acquaintances of Daniel O'Connell as well as of the American abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. R. D., in particular, helped to make his son aware of reformist currents through opposition not only to slavery and discrimination, but also to various policies of the United Kingdom, including the expansion of the opium trade in China.

The younger Webb also experienced empire firsthand when, as a teen, his family sent him to Australia to improve his health. On his return trip home, he worked as a ship hand. As an adult, he picked up the family mantle, succeeding to his father's printing business and maintaining his own affective networks and interests that addressed issues such as women's rights and Home Rule. During his days as a member of parliament, he moved from Dublin to London and his contacts included Irish nationalist politicians, British Liberals, and figures from throughout the empire, especially South Asian elites, often meeting them through his membership in the National Liberal Club. At the apex of his political career, he served for a year as president of the Indian National Congress, traveling to the annual convention held at Madras in December 1894.

As part of the Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies series, the book contributes to several ongoing scholarly discussions. Like Leela Gandhi, Regan-Lefebvre is interested in the part played by cross-cultural relationships in shaping nationalist understanding.[1] Ultimately she sees Webb as a civic nationalist, that is, one whose concept of national belonging was based on adherence to political ideas rather than on blood or ethnicity. As such, in spite of Webb's interest in the Gaelic revival, Regan-Lefebvre contends that Webb's nationalism ran counter to the impulses of those like D. P. Moran whose work profoundly influenced early twentieth-century Ireland. Such a conclusion, offered all too briefly in her summary chapter, calls for greater scrutiny. The Moranite strain of Irish-Irelandism was merely one of many in play during Webb's later years, and Webb's very interest in Gaelicism–as well as his public criticism of elements within that movement–testify to the diversity of the early revival era. Regan-Lefebvre devotes attention more profitably to the coming together

of Irish and South Asian activists in late Victorian London; therefore, her study of Webb fits well within the burgeoning literature on colonial encounters at the imperial center that scholars such as Antoinette Burton have done much to promote.[2] Further, those interested in Home Rule will find material on the practical challenges behind the Irish party's formation and restructuring that will augment the recent works of Alvin Jackson and Patrick Maume, as well as the more classic studies of Conor Cruise O'Brien and F. S. L. Lyons.[3] Because Webb and his close friend J. F. X. O'Brien were integral but often behind-the-scenes figures in keeping the party (or its factions) functioning, Regan-Lefebvre's attention to their efforts is most welcome.

While the book roughly follows the chronological arc of Webb's life, it is organized thematically, with Regan-Lefebvre cleverly addressing issues when they took precedence for her subject. Of course, such authorial license is necessarily arbitrary: few of us actually focus only on a single element of our lives or worldviews at any given time. Still, this analytical choice allows readers or instructors to hone in on those chapters of the book relevant to their work, whether it would be Victorian social activism, the Home Rule cause from the time of Isaac Butt to the divided post-Parnell era, or the cross-pollination of nationalist ideas in the imperial metropolis.

Sensitive and prone to public displays of emotion, Webb was ripe for parody and in the end for sharp handling by the grasping Timothy Healy, whose attention drove him to resign from active politics after his return from India. Little wonder that Webb was given to intermittent bouts of depression (or perhaps exhaustion), during which he would temporarily withdraw from his various causes only to return when energy and invitation bestirred him to action. As *Cosmopolitan Nationalism* makes abundantly clear, however, such retreats were both strategic and emotionally necessary, and allowed Webb to remain a determined activist in domestic and imperial affairs to the end of his days.

Notes

[1]. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[2]. In particular, see Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[3]. Titles on Home Rule are voluminous. These four represent good introductions to the party and movement: Alvin Jackson, Home *Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life, 1891-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999); Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and His Party, 1880-90* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); and F. S. L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-1910* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975, c. 1951). Numerous biographies of figures such as Charles Stewart Parnell, John Dillon, Isaac Butt, and Timothy Healy are also useful for comparison. See especially F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), *John Dillon: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Terence De Vere White, *The Road of Excess* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, Ltd., 1946); and Frank Callanan, *T. M. Healy* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).

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