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The British statesman I consider did most for the British Empire since 1783

The period since 1783 has produced great Empire statesmen such as Lord Dalhousie, who has been described as the second founder of British India, and Lord Durham, whose work in Canada paved the way for a united effort for the progress of the country and ultimately for responsible government. Yet among these brilliant statesmen, the one whose contribution far surpasses those of the others is Cecil Rhodes who has left so great a mark on the Geography and the History of Africa.

Cecil Rhodes had originally intended to become a minister but a break-down in health forced him to leave England in 1870 to work in the Kimberley diamond mines. Before 1872, owing to a stroke of luck, he found himself rich and physically strong. After exploring the interior of South Africa for eight months, Rhodes resolved to secure all that fine country for the British Empire and to see that Britain only dominated in its administration. From that time till he died, the only ambition of his life was to extend the Empire by the acquisition of the whole of South Africa.

He entered Oxford University to prepare himself for the great work he had to do. Until he graduated at Oriel College in 1879, he spent his vacations in South Africa where he was a member of the Cape Parliament and where his large financial interests were daily growing in importance. Rhodes firmly established himself as an important financier by amalgamating the large Kimberley diamond mines into the De Beers company. Those who shared his views on public questions regarded his connection with the financial world as a stumbling block. To Rhodes, however, the amassing of money was a necessary and indispensable step in the realization of his ambition and hence he was proud of his ability to make money.

The irregular overflow of Transvaal Boers into Bechuanaland which Rhodes considered the "Suez Canal" to South Africa, caused him to take several energetic measures which ended in the annexation of Bechuanaland in 1885 and later of Zululand and Swaziland. This feat was really the first round in the long duel between him as a representative of British interests and Paul Kruger, head of the militant

Boers in Transvaal.

When gold was discovered in the Witwatersrand in 1885 and the Transvaal became wealthy, Rhodes began to fear that Germany, ~~and~~ which was annexing South West Africa, and the Transvaal might bar his progress in extending British influence northwards. Thus in October 1889 he formed a British Chartered Company to trade and mine in the area north of Transvaal as far as the river Zambesi and to bring it under British protection. Within a short time, though that country had passed through the trial of a war, two native rebellions and the scourge ofinderpest, it had become Rhodesia, a province of the Empire, with a white population of twelve thousand.

Rhodes became Prime Minister of the Cape in 1890, and remained in power largely owing to the votes of the Boers of the colony whom he had spared no pains to conciliate. As he had won the confidence of both British and Boers in the colony, he became a despot. During his term of office he did much great work. He worked hard to elevate ~~the~~ and develop the field of local politics: he introduced an educational test in the franchise for natives, limiting it to men with an income equal to a labourer's wage and thus abolished without distinction of colour, the abuses of the "blanket vote."

He took a very keen interest in education and showed himself an ardent supporter of Lovedale, the successful institution for educating the natives. The first feature of his native policy was that liquor should be kept from the natives, the second, that they should be guaranteed the earnings of their labour and the third, that they should be educated in the practical arts of peace.

His position as a benevolent despot had several drawbacks. He was so impressed by a sense of the shortness of his life that he abused his power as far as to become intolerant of any kind of control or opposition. Those who were unwilling to accept the role of dogmatic authority without question found it impossible to work with him. He was utterly lacking in

regard for the individual and a great part of his life was therefore spent in the company of satellites and men whom he used with cynical unconcern for the furtherance of his ambition.

The share which Rhodes took in the planning of the disastrous Jameson raid ended the period of his brilliant ~~pre~~ premiership in 1896. It is true that he was acquitted in the subsequent inquiries held in the Cape parliament and the British House of Commons. It was nevertheless agreed that he had acted in a manner hardly consistent with his duty as Prime Minister of the Cape and Managing Director of the British South Africa Company. He calmly accepted the consequences, making no attempt to conceal his share in the raid and taking full responsibility for what had been done by subordinates.

In January 1896, Rhodes resigned from office and turned his attention to the development of Rhodesia. His idea was to live in that country so as to give all the encouragement and the stimulus of his own presence to the development of its resources. The great courage and coolness which he showed during the Matabele rising of 1896 caused the Chiefs to surrender: his riding unarmed to interview the chiefs was one of those actions which make life worth living.

In the few years left to him Rhodes had a railway line constructed from the boundary of the Transvaal to Bulawayo and made arrangements to continue it to the end of Lake Tanganyika. This construction was only a part of his pet scheme to connect the Cape by a British line of communications to Cairo. He also concluded arrangements for the construction of a telegraph line through Rhodesia to Egypt. He bought farms and left them to the colonists and even settled four thousand natives, chiefly rebellious chiefs and witch-doctors on his estate both for their comfort and the convenience of having them all assembled under his eye. He built a large dam to hold fifty million gallons of water and an Agricultural

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College beside it. Thus he had ⁴not merely founded Rhodesia but had supported and inspired it.

When the South African War broke out in 1899, Rhodes took his part in sustaining the hardships of a siege at Kimberley and his health broke down. Though he lived to see victory assured for the British, he died at Muesenberg on March 26th 1902 and was buried in the Matoppos hills.

Rhodes' life's work did not end with his death. The subsequent Union of South Africa was mainly due to him. Before he came on the scene, the Boers were striving for a Boer Union under a Boer flag; the British toyed with various schemes for making federation an excuse for finally crushing Boer aspirations. It is due to him more than any other that the British and the Boers realized that a joint action for Union would alone gain the end desired by both.

Indirectly, too, he made the British and Boer sides more equal in bargaining for Union by his services to the whole of South Africa and his acquisition of Rhodesia. Although at first hostile to this expansion, the Boers never forgot that but for him, Rhodesia, like South ^{West} Africa, might have passed to Germany. For the first time, the Boers realised that British, and not their own enterprise, had brought a great new tract of South Africa under the civilising influences of Boers and British combined.

There is often a great deal of talk about the imperial idea, but unfortunately, self is so often beneath it. With Rhodes it was absolutely pure and the ideal of his life. Cynical people who believe that the imperial idea is always a cover for self realise that there was no such desire in Rhodes when they hear that an hour before his death he said, "So little done, so much to do." This showed that even at the point of death all his thoughts were for the welfare of the Empire.

The essence of Rhodes' will was the founding of scholarships. All that Rhodes could ^{do} in the end towards the spread of British ideals, restoring Anglo-Saxon unity and general

understanding in the whole world, was to arrange for a number of poor but deserving students from the British Empire, Germany and the United States to go to Oxford University. The will clearly revealed the constancy of Rhodes' conviction that the British Empire which he had served so proudly was among the greatest of the organised forces united for universal good will.

About eighteen hundred Rhodes Scholars have been selected for Oxford, fostered and sent out by Oxford. The effect on the world is that eighteen hundred young men have been given a time of happiness which but for Rhodes they might never have had. More generations will get something in life that they might otherwise never have had and the accumulated effect of what they have gained may go a long way towards establishing world unity.

At the general meeting of the South Africa Company in the year following Rhodes' death, Earl Grey said of him, "He was in truth the most strenuous lover of his country, the most single-minded and the greatest-hearted man I ever met. During his life he gave all his energies and all his wealth to the service of the Empire, and in his will, he has bequeathed to the entire Anglo-Saxon world the priceless legacy of an inspiring idea..... I have come across, and sometimes in the most unexpected quarters, men whose characters have been entirely changed by the example of Cecil Rhodes, and whose ambition it is now to administer as a public trust, considerable proportions of those fortunes which but for him they would probably have spent on themselves."

Field Marshal Smuts said of him, "He used all his great wealth to conserve what was precious in our past, to protect it from the sordid hand of the vandal, and to deepen interest in it and love for it in the future."

Thus the publishing of Cecil Rhodes' will had the effect of silencing his dead detractors and converting many of his critics while setting the seal on his completed life. His name passed at once to the place it was probably destined to take in History as one of those who have made the British Empire what it is today and as one of the greatest imperial statesmen who have ever lived.

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