

Autumn 1857: The Making of the Indian "Mutiny"

Author(s): Don Randall

Source: *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Victorian Religion (2003), pp. 3-17

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25058611>

Accessed: 28-01-2019 17:50 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Victorian Literature and Culture*

## AUTUMN 1857: THE MAKING OF THE INDIAN “MUTINY”

---

*By Don Randall*

IT IS THE EARLY AFTERNOON of October 7, 1857. Charles Hadden Spurgeon ascends to the pulpit and announces, “there are such things as national judgments, national chastisements for national sins” (1). The topic is the electrifying and as yet unresolved “Mutiny” in India.<sup>1</sup> The speaker is arguably the most popular preacher of the mid-Victorian period. I do not, however, attach a special importance to Spurgeon’s words simply on the basis of his engaging topic and his personal celebrity. Spurgeon is speaking in the Crystal Palace, that signal monument to mid-Victorian England’s preeminence among nations; he has before him an assembled crowd of 24,000 listeners. Spurgeon, moreover, is not alone in sermonizing on rebellion in India on this particular day. More or less simultaneously reverend preachers all over the British Isles are weaving their way through the “Mutiny” topic. Queen Victoria, as one learns from the dailies of September 28 (I take my text from the *Morning Post*), has declared October 7 a national “fast-day”: “We, taking into our most serious consideration the grievous mutiny . . . in India, command . . . a Public Day of Fast, Humiliation, and Prayer . . . so both we and our people may humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon for our sins” (Victoria 4).

My writing will strive to establish October 7 as a key moment, perhaps *the* key moment, in the consolidation of the meaning of the Indian “Mutiny” for England and the British Empire. Upon examination, the public discourses of the fast-day – the fast-day sermons, and the press commentary that precedes and follows – demonstrate the foundational importance of the “Mutiny” in British imperial mythology and the particular ways in which it became important. Most significantly, the fast-day discourses help to account for a peculiar and enduring fixity characterizing British envisioning of the situations and events that came to be known as the “Mutiny.” Considering British representations of the 1857 revolt in *The Other Side of the Medal*, Edward Thompson observes, “Our histories and our novels have proceeded on certain clearly marked lines” (11). He adds, regretfully, that “English interpretation” of events “is too firmly established for easy displacement” (12) – despite its several and obvious limitations. The revolt’s “larger issues . . . and its lasting effects, have never been competently or dispassionately handled,” Thompson affirms; “It has been chronicled from one side only, and from one set of documents; or from no documents at all, but mere stereotyped hearsay” (77). Moreover, the problem Thompson outlines is quite particular to the “Mutiny.” At Thompson’s time of writing, the event is not yet seventy years old. The body of literature

it has generated, during its unfolding and subsequently, is “enormous”; “yet,” Thompson stresses, “the episode is less clearly set forth than many that are much further away in time from our day” (45). One should add that Thompson’s 1925 book is not notably successful in its attempt to right the record. Nor does Indian independence provoke immediate revision. In 1951, John Masters publishes the “Mutiny” novel *Nightrunners of Bengal*, retailing, with appreciable popular success, the various tried-and-true elements of the Victorian period’s imperial melodrama: a revolt-fomenting “holy man” (leprous, as it happens); shadowy, duplicitous sepoy conspirators; raped and mutilated bodies of British women; and finally, a grim and atrocious act of retributive justice – more precisely, a gruesomely detailed “blowing away from guns” of rebel ringleaders. Even three decades later, in his revisionist history *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857* (posthumously published in 1986), Eric Stokes names “folk memory” as a principal obstacle his work has faced, suggesting that a responsible rewriting of 1857 must struggle constantly against the constraints of deeply traced “lines of interpretation” (4). Thus, the problem for Thompson and Stokes (and in a different way, for Masters) resides in the firm fixity of a misapprehended “Mutiny.” In this present writing, I strive to discover when, why, and how the misapprehensions became fixed.

### *The “Mutiny” as Information*

THE 1857 REVOLT enters history problematically. To state the case briefly, the British public of 1857 *must* come to an understanding of this unprecedented imperial upheaval, even though the means of understanding are notably insufficient. Desire for information far outstrips access to information; opinion, necessarily, remains in lag of events. This situation is unusual and unsettling, because the sense of immediate access to information is well established in mid-nineteenth-century Europe: news is a daily accumulation, which one is accustomed to receiving as up-to-date, and the very recent development of telegraph adds substantially to this modern notion of informational immediacy. Unfortunately, 1857’s news of India imposes itself as urgent and unignorable, yet sets itself entirely at odds with English expectation. It is *not* new, *never* new: by sea, the mails require nearly three months; the telegraph, its electric speed retarded by intercontinental relays, takes at least six weeks. (The problem of generating news telegraphically is compounded, of course, by the fact that the cutting of the Indian telegraph lines is among the first tactical acts of the mutineers.) Thus, on June 26, 1857, England receives, by telegraphic dispatch, news of the outbreaks at Meerut and Delhi, which occurred in the second week of May; on November 10, London learns of late September’s crucial action, the recapture of Delhi (see Seton xiii).

The telegraph, moreover, falls short not only as regards its promise of speed in transmission; it is notoriously spare in detail. This problem becomes, not surprisingly, a matter of journalistic complaint. On September 29, just a little more than a week before the fast-day and the day after its public announcement, the *Evening Herald*’s editorial contributions include the following comments concerning recent “telegraphic messages” from rebellious India: “none of them contained a fair summary of what had actually occurred. The arrival of the mail invariably brought details, which gave a darker aspect to this truly disastrous affair. Whether by accident or design, something has always been omitted by the telegraph that materially altered the character of the intelligence” (2). The *Illustrated London News* of October 3, however, provides a more detailed and evocative statement of the problematic relationship between public expectation and the information media. The article “The News

from India" begins by characterizing public expectation as a matter of "feverish anxiety," then proceeds by questioning the reliability of "telegraphic announcements." The telegraph writers are obliged "to epitomise the news" they receive from their sources, but they

do not invariably select the most salient and important items, and are sometimes unfortunate in the construction they put upon events, or in the phraseology with which they record them. Thus it happens not infrequently that the telegrams tell one story, and that the newspapers and private correspondence received a few days afterwards contradict, or put a different interpretation upon it. Hence it is often necessary to suspend our judgment upon events until the full details are before us. In the meantime the public is justified in making as much as possible of the good news which the telegraph conveys; – for good news is not likely to be misunderstood or wrongly told; – and in trusting, if it be evil news in the telegrams, that more copious information will tend to modify its nature, and rob it of its darker characteristics. (329)

This second commentary contrasts notably with the earlier one, still voicing concern with the inadequacy of telegraphically mediated information, but giving surprising scope to an unreasoning optimism – which tries to assume a reasonable form. The basic sense is that the public has the right to draw conclusions in advance of the means of verification, the right to produce and subscribe to a collective fantasy.

But it should be stressed that the British press's (and thus the British public's) uncertainty and frustration are also experienced at source – and even at source, opinion and interpretation build on shaky ground. Reverend Alexander Duff, writing from Calcutta, denounces in a letter of mid-September various "wild, ugly . . . unauthenticated rumours flying about, respecting Lucknow, Agra, and other places" (121). Earlier, in August, he had complained regretfully that "the great bulk of the British people" have submitted to "some species of hallucination respecting the real condition of affairs here [in India]" (96). Yet, this same writer repeatedly presents as authentic details some of the wildest, most atrocious suggestions, figuring forth British children who are force-fed the flesh hacked from their father's body, or who are torn limb from limb by blood-maddened rebels.<sup>2</sup> This problem of arriving at truth with insufficient and uncertain information is similarly apparent in Sir Colin Campbell's early appearing history of 1858, which Sashi Bhusan Chaudhuri has submitted to careful critical evaluation. Chaudhuri observes that Campbell, although he had been a prominent actor in the "Mutiny" drama, markets many of the usual, never verified atrocities, such as English infants and children being tossed into the air and spitted on bayonets. Campbell thus conforms, in Chaudhuri's view, to "the feelings of the people of England who greedily swallowed all sorts of gossip about massacres of Europeans" (47). Yet Campbell's book proclaims that it intends to "remedy" the problem of "Mutiny" misinformation, the problem of rumour-inflamed report that arrives in England, as Campbell states the case, "in so fragmentary a manner at such uncertain intervals accompanied by details so undigested, doubtful and contradictory" that the British public's understanding of the revolt must remain "very confused" (qtd. in Chaudhuri 47). Thus one can say with some confidence that, in the summer and fall of 1857, the time of the Indian insurrection's first unfolding as news, English men and women are not yet very thoroughly alerted to the uncertainty and instability of "Mutiny" report. But it is evident, more crucially, that the powerful impact of the early wild tales of horror proved remarkably durable – making itself felt even in subsequent, would-be corrective publications.

Campbell's history, as Chaudhuri suggests, conforms to rather than counters the sensationalistic style and content of journalistic accounts and most all of the numerous early histories. To give a more detailed sense of this style and content, which has its analogues in the texts of the fast-day sermons, I will quote here a quite astonishing single sentence from Charles Ball's *The History of the Indian Mutiny*. Describing the supposed fate of Europeans captured at Delhi, Ball writes: "Delicate women, mothers and daughters, were stripped of their clothing, violated, turned naked into the streets, beaten with canes, pelted with filth, and abandoned to the beastly lusts of the blood-stained rabble, until death or madness deprived them of all consciousness of their unutterable misery" (1: 75). The extremity of the "Mutiny" horrors evoked here and elsewhere must raise the question of the real scope of insurgent violence. "Mutiny" sources, although abundant, are predominantly British and thus, as archivist Rosemary Seton notes, compromised by "an irremediable bias" (ix). However, working from these sources, historian Christopher Hibbert concludes that, at Delhi, "fifty . . . Europeans and Eurasians, nearly all of them women and children" were captured and subsequently "murdered by swords" in the courtyard of the King's palace (85). Dispersed individuals and small groups were killed in other locations around the city. As for Cawnpore, the most horrific site of the murder of women and children, Andrew Ward's exhaustively detailed account records "seventy-three women" and "over a hundred children" killed by five men armed with heavy swords (417). The killing, thus, was far from delicate, but summary. There are no instances of torture, nor any accounts of rape or attempted rape. As Jenny Sharpe observes at the outset of her *Allegories of Empire*, British magistrates charged with investigating "Mutiny"-bred reports of rape, torture, and mutilation found no substantiating evidence.

Disparities between discourse and event clearly are a crucial aspect of the making of the "Mutiny"; indeed, one should consider the production of such disparities as systemic rather than random. Working from recent communications theory, one may say that public discourse of the "Mutiny" tends not so much to inform and transform, but rather to consolidate existing patterns of thought and emotion; this discourse performs communication as ritual rather than as transmission. As James Carey has argued, the ritualistic function of communication relies on its conceptual association with "communion" and "community"; it entails "the representation of shared beliefs," which enables "the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action" (18-19). Ritual communication produces what it is assumed to portray, recreating the world by symbolic action, reinscribing the communication's participants within a world sustained by consensus. This ritual function of communication, very evident in news mediation of the Indian insurrection, manifests itself still more strongly in the fast-day sermons – which are, after all, instances of ritual speech, and which have an acknowledged role in confirming and consolidating the community of shared belief.

### *The Fast-Day: From Proclamation to Sermon*

IN ITS RESPONSE to Victoria's proclamation, as in other respects, Spurgeon's Crystal Palace sermon, the fast-day's "main-stage" performance, deserves particular attention. Notwithstanding the stark conviction evident in his opening remarks – "there are . . . national judgments . . . for national sins" – Spurgeon's explicit response to Victoria's pronouncements is curiously ambivalent, marked by so much cautious qualification that it takes on the tones

of irony:

It is an opinion published by authority (and who am I that I should dispute the great authorities of England?) that one part of the reason of this dreadful visitation is the sin of the people of England themselves . . . Granting that as being a truth (mark, I am not the originator of it, as it is the Proclamation, and who am I that I should dispute such a high authority as that?) granting that it is our sin that has brought it on us, what then, let me ask, are our sins? (4)

Clearly, what Spurgeon recognizes, and what apparently nettles him a little, is the fact that the proclamation effectively *prescribes* a thesis for the fast-day meditations; it strongly implies, if it does not quite assert, that British sins are the cause of the grievous mutiny in India. Spurgeon evidently resists the proclamation's rendering of the case, and this resistance is written in more than just mock-humble asides.<sup>3</sup> Not long before he refers directly to the proclamation, the preacher declares, "The sins of the Government of India are black and deep!" He evokes the shrieking of "tormented natives" and "the cursing of dethroned princes," carefully stressing that he is not an "apologist" for British dominion in South Asia (3). After Spurgeon makes mention of the proclamation, he does strive to explore the notion of public sins, sins of the community at large. But once again, he launches in with a rather more specific notion of where the fault lies: "Oh Britain!" he pleads, "weep for deeds which governors have not yet strength of mind to stop." A few sentences later, he enjoins "the representatives of the press . . . to sting a little virtue into some of [the British] governors" (5). British government, both at home and abroad, seems in noteworthy moments to take on the role of the villain in Spurgeon's piece. Not so clear, however, is Spurgeon's sense of whether the "sins" of English government and governors are, quite simply, English sins. Are sins of government – if such things are conceivable at all – the sins of a nation?

It's crucial, therefore, to observe that Spurgeon conforms to the proclamation's direction in the general thrust of his speech. As his opening sentence makes clear, he commits himself to the notions of national sin and national judgment; as his speech develops, he repeatedly calls upon his listeners to hear, to attend to, the "rod," the "'appointed' rod . . . ordained of God" (3). Spurgeon does ascribe a portion of responsibility to the nation as a whole, including the Jacks and Janes of the general populace. In these ways, he conforms not only to the proclamation's fast-day orders but also to the more general thrust of the other fast-day sermons. Julius Lloyd, preaching at Brentwood, asserts that "great public evils are chastisements for public sins" (5). Rev. Maguire gets a little more precise about the general idea: "National sin is your sin in the aggregate" (51). Rev. Hugh M'Neile speaks, somewhat oxymoronically, of "providential calamities" (1), justifying the notion of "national sins" by affirming that, through the East India Company and the British government, "the nation has acted in India" (4).

The sermons' responses to the proclamation subscribe, more than tacitly, to the idea that the British nation is directly implicated in the initiatives and mishaps of British colonial government in India. Between the national homeland and its colony, between British subjects and British governmental bodies, distinctions are obscured, if not quite collapsed. Moreover, the sermons enact a tacit confederacy of church and imperial state; in so doing, they provide a spiritual, ostensibly Christian ratification of British dominion in India. Even when the preachers are critical of British colonial government, the fundamental rightness of India's status as a British colonial possession never becomes, more than superficially, a matter of question.

*The Sermons in Detail*

THE FAST-DAY PREACHERS put forward a variety of statements and arguments to provide the key conceptual proposition (“national chastisements for national sins”) with a sustaining framework. In doing this work the sermons effectively subscribe to and reiterate established public perspectives, most importantly those (themselves somewhat varied) propounded in the most broadly disseminated and influential organs of the periodical press. Even while the nation reels from the shock of colonial upheaval, the sermons make their contribution to what Ranajit Guha has called “the prose of counter-insurgency” (45). They shape the historicizing of the Indian uprisings, the terms of their inscription in history, assimilating Indian anti-colonial insurrection within an envisioning of the Empire’s “transcendental Destiny” (Guha 74). Especially when considered in conjunction with the discourse of the news media, the fast-day sermons offer what is effectively a staging of history-in-the-making; they show that history, far from just happening and being recorded, is made, and that this making may occur, as in the case of the “Mutiny,” in an intense moment when power and discourse enact the deep intimacy of their relations.

Thus, the Indian revolt, typically, is military not national; “Their revolt,” Spurgeon roundly asserts, “is not the revolt of a nation” (2). (It is, oddly, a national event for England but not for India.) The sepoys – the Indian soldiers in British service – have been unduly pampered and petted, like spoiled children; their mutinous actions, however, are atrocious and demand rigorous punishment – more specifically, death penalties. Such assertions are in the sermons as they are in the newspapers, and the preachers frequently acknowledge the journalistic press as a principal source of information and public opinion. But the sermons do give a special inflection to their materials. Taking for example the question of punishment, virtually all of the sermons insist that punishment must be carried out in the spirit of justice, that it should not be tainted by the fury of vengeance. By contrast, in the *Illustrated London News* of August 8, “Notes of the Week” announces that British officers in India will exact a vengeance “unparalleled in the history of retribution” and that, already, “gibbet and cannon are avenging our slaughtered women and children” (135). By August 22, one learns, again in “Notes of the Week,” of “ordinarily calm and humane men, who one and all join in the cry for vengeance” (195).<sup>4</sup> Even within a few days of the fast-day, on October 3, the *ILN* lauds the “signal vengeance” exacted upon the Punjab and voices the hope that it will “strike a wholesome terror through all India” (“The News from India” 329).

Evaluation of British colonial administration of India, which occurs in Spurgeon, typically finds its place in the sermons, although opinions are somewhat varied. M’Neile condemns the policy of “impartiality” in religious matters (5–7). Like several others, he protests that the pre-rebellion Government of India not only tolerated but “supported idolatry” (10), protecting local religious practice and even providing financial supports. As others do, he laments that, within the East India Company’s army, it is forbidden to proselytize to the Indian soldiery. Rev. Morey Weale follows a somewhat similar line, observing that “rebellions and mutinies are the natural fruit of bad government” (7). Taking a very practical view, Archdeacon Sinclair criticises the management of the Indian army. Such criticism has a well developed basis in journalistic commentary and parliamentary debate. “The Debate on India,” in the *ILN* of August 1, includes extensive argumentation of military mismanagement along with condemnation of a dangerous and reprehensible ignorance, in governmental circles, of “the real state of matters in India” (105–06); the same publication

covers Disraeli's three-hour speech in the most recent meeting of the House of Commons, in which the speaker denounces "the unsatisfactory condition of the Bengal Army" and then asserts, against energetic contestation, that the revolt is "national, and not merely military" (114) – this last being an extremely unpopular position, both at the time of its enunciation and subsequently.

On the topic of British colonial management, however, some preachers do go against the denunciatory grain. Rev. Canon Stowell affirms that "compared with the Mohammedan rule, the rule of Britain has been an angelic rule, and there have been wonderful social and moral improvements" (147). Joseph Sortain roundly repudiates charges "of long and uniform cruelty and oppression . . . alleged against our Rule in India," ascribing such charges to "foreigners," of course (15). These positions have also their journalistic precedents. Working from popular notions of an Anglo-Russian "Great Game," the *ILN* of July 4 voices front-page charges of sedition against Russian emissaries in India. In October, shortly after the fast-day, "Our Weekly Gossip" in the *Athenaeum* denounces two French journals, the *Courrier de Paris* and *Univers*, for defending the infamous rebel chieftain Nana Sahib and finding in the figure of General Neill the darkest villain of Cawnpore (Kanpur).

Of course, the interrogation of British government in India gives rise to some division of opinion in large part because it is an interrogation as to cause – why this terrible mutiny; what made it happen? Even the speakers who venture to condemn governmental policy and practice find a much more fearful and compelling cause elsewhere. The sermons, almost invariably, work to demonize Indian culture and Indian colonial subjects. In this respect, consensus, among the sermons themselves and in their relation to the press, is more nearly seamless. The sermons, following the press, present their versions of the sensationalized, xenophobic hysteria that Patrick Brantlinger puts forward, in his *Rule of Darkness*, as the characteristic feature of Victorian "Mutiny" discourse. Concerning sepoy actions, Spurgeon proclaims, "Not to-day shall I detail their acts of debauchery, bloodshed, and worse than bestiality"; he will not, he claims, "dare to hint at some of the crimes" (2). As to his not detailing, he is fairly much as good as his word, but a will to hint is all too obviously in evidence. Hinting at, evoking, the lurid details of which his listeners are already well aware is very much a part of Spurgeon's rhetorical strategy. Most of the fast-day speakers protest a need for modest discretion; relatively few actually manage to respect that need. Here, as in the case of sensationalist (and largely unfounded) newspaper reports, women and children take centre-stage. Sortain must talk of women and children who are made "first the sport of demoniacs, and then the materials of their hellish holocaust!" (13). Weale must mention "the cries of British women and children dying under the infliction of every torture which the tongue *cannot* tell" – seeming to forget that a good number of published tongues can tell and have told. In late September, very shortly before Victoria's decision for a fast-day, prominent English dailies and weeklies publish reports, received from members of General Havelock's relieving force, of the Bibighar massacre at Cawnpore. The *Times* of September 30 offers, under the title "The Cawnpore Massacres," a representatively lurid account: "The place was a mass of blood," it begins, moving then through details of severed tresses and fragments of children's clothes, and arriving finally at the well in the grounds of the Bibighar, which presents the victims' "limbs . . . sticking out in a mass of gory confusion" (6).

Not surprisingly, the sermons seek to vilify Indian religions, focusing attention, most typically and most intensely, on the piquant barbarities of "Hindooism." For Spurgeon, Hinduism is "nothing more or less than a mass of the rankest filth that ever imagination



could have conceived.” It teaches “immorality” and “compels men to sin” – even “to commit bestial acts in public” (4). In the soberer accounts, “idolatry” tends to be the watchword, a charge that serves conveniently to connect the “Mutiny” crisis with the Biblical contests between the chosen people and the children of Baal. What is still more convenient, however, is the easy, almost indiscernible move from Hinduism to the essential mind or character of India. Such a maneuver is already evident when Rev. Dr. Cumming blandly observes, “it is a remarkable fact that the spread of knowledge of any sort, is fatal to Hindooism” (29). Xenophobic logic is unmistakable when Weale speaks, again almost casually, of “[t]he mingled treachery, licentiousness, and thirst for blood, which seems from the earliest days to have been the characteristic of Eastern people” (4). In this, as in most of their other positions, the sermons are not innovating but confirming. Particularly in the month of September, defamatory accounts of Hinduism appear frequently in the press: the *ILN* of September 5 includes the article “Juggernaut,” which details polluting “crimes,” “obscene sculptures and rites,” and “priestly murders” (234); in the *Times* of September 8, “H. P.” works from James Mill’s *History of India* toward the assertion that Hindu “institutions” are entirely inconsistent with “the laws of human welfare” (8). This strongly marked turn against Hinduism in the press and in the sermons demonstrates more than any other single aspect the degree to which the “Mutiny” is a product of a specifiable historical moment. In the summer of 1857, the dominant view of the Indian revolt had been developed under the aegis of a Mohammedan conspiracy. However, throughout September and into early October – that is, in the weeks leading up to the fast-day – the atrocious massacres at Cawnpore are the hot news. These massacres are enacted under the authority of Nana Sahib, a Mahratha, and a Hindu.

Despite their very close affiliation with the positions of the press, the sermons do serve to consolidate a view of the “Mutiny” that is rarely more than implicit in the press: the antagonism between Britain and India is recast as one between Christianity and Hinduism; between England, as a Christian nation, and India, as a nation of atrocious idolaters. It is not finally imperial interests but Christian faith and morality that oblige England to oppose Indian insurgency. Following from this construction of the case, along a notably Protestant path, the sermons make the Indian uprisings the matter for deliberations of conscience. In a remarkably univocal way, they present the uprisings as judgment imposed by divine justice as the punishment of national sin. Anti-colonial rebellion is configured as an episode of English national destiny, which disavows the rebels’ specific social and political motives. Indian insurrection calls for a collective review of English consciences; the South Asian “Mutiny” functions, curiously, as a commentary upon the moral and spiritual state of the English nation. What occurs is an appropriation of Indian situations and events: the Indian uprisings have no real meaning for India; they are the Almighty’s means of elaborating England’s meaning for the edification of Englishmen. The paths to this end are, however, several – and some of them devious.

Spurgeon’s path is among the most straightforward. Having invoked the proclamation, albeit somewhat ambivalently, Spurgeon pledges himself to pursue its implications and to seek out national sins, particularly those that are at once commonplace and eminently reprehensible. He points to “the infamous nuisances of Holywell-street” (where pornography circulates); he points to the prostitutes of “Haymarket and . . . Regent-street” (4). He denounces the indecent “amusements” offered in the nation’s “playhouses” (5), then ends by lamenting at some length the various forms of heartless exploitation that English laborers must endure. For Spurgeon, the “Mutiny” pricks a notably social and political conscience,

but one whose light is befogged somewhat, despite evident awareness of class differences, by a failure to distinguish clearly between the English populace and the British imperial nation-state. This problem, however, is much more pronounced in other sermons, notably Weale's.

Weale works to collapse entirely the gap that should stand between governmental action and popular, public responsibility. "In some way or other," this speaker asks, "have we broken the laws by which our conduct towards our Eastern subjects should have been regulated?" He proceeds, "Plainly then our first business is to examine strictly what has been the manner of our government. Have we governed that country wisely and well . . . ?" (8). For Spurgeon, Indians, even revolted sepoys, are "fellow subjects" of the English crown (2); for Weale, Indians are "our Eastern subjects." Concerning the actions of the Government of India, Spurgeon retains his right to circumspection; Weale speaks to his congregation of "our government" in India. Not only in conception but even in its rhetoric, Weale's speech allies itself more closely than Spurgeon's to recent press treatments of the revolt in India. Anticipating the fast-day deliberations of the morrow, a *Times* article of October 6 orders itself around a quite lengthy series of questions, including "What are we to blame in this matter? What amendment shall we make?" (6). Weale follows upon this rhetorical vein, strengthening its religious inflection and also underscoring the notion of nationally shared responsibility: "Wherein then," he asks, "lies *our* share of the common penitence? What is the duty that lies immediately across *our* path?" [Weale's emphasis]. The answer is startling in its unhesitating commitment: "First we are called upon heartily to co-operate with the government in its endeavours to re-establish our supremacy . . . , and to strike a death blow to the spirit of rebellion" (11).

Weale's approach, however, is not a typical one. As I've suggested, the sermons' most noteworthy common gesture is the appeal to conscience. This appeal is certainly present in Weale, but is significantly reduced by his willingness to discover the possibility of national sin in the seamless union of the public and governmental spheres. Julius Lloyd, on the other hand, develops the idea of national sins by drawing analogies. In so doing, he is able to stay much closer to intimate interrogations of conscience. Having vilified Indian idolatry, he declares that "Covetousness," "Licentiousness," and "Selfishness" – sins that are amply in evidence in England – are forms of idolatry. He observes that "there are castes and classes at home" (9), and not only in barbarous, backward India. The English, he continues, "live at home in a society bound together by the ties of the purse, and not of the heart; and in the same want of faith the policy of our Indian empire has been dictated" (11). The solution to this double problem, let there be no doubt, is a duly thoughtful return to the "heart," to the Christian heart, the seat of conscience and moral decision-making. Conscience is the faculty that can reestablish the sharp social and moral distinctions that should set Englishmen entirely apart from their South Asian counterparts; conscience, that is, is the instrument that can break apart or dissolve the troubling analogies Lloyd's sermon puts forward. This emphasis upon conscience may be regarded as a crystallization of expectation, of an expectation initially roused by the text of Victoria's announcement and confirmed subsequently in the press commentary that anticipates the fast-day. The *Times* of October 7, for example, announces the fast-day as a day of "national self-examination," thus suggesting the morally driven introspection one associates with the workings of conscience.

A line of thinking very similar to Lloyd's drives Rev. Canon Stowell's appeal to his listeners. The reverend speaker first recalls the prayer Christ offers in the face of his tormentors: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (140). Stowell then affirms

that the sepoy rebels “know not what they do.” He suggests, in other words, that the sepoys lack agency; moreover, that they fail to manifest that well developed self-consciousness which would be the foundation of the moral faculty of conscience. Conscience again emerges very clearly as a key distinction of English character; the assiduous pursuit of the work of conscience becomes an Englishman’s moral and cultural duty. These are points Stowell immediately drives home: “God is surely teaching us individually a special humiliation. Do not let any man say, ‘I am guiltless in the matter; . . . I have nothing to do with the conduct of the East India Company or any other body,’ but [let us] try to knit ourselves more and more together. Let each man humble himself before God and plead with him, – Oh Lord, correct us . . .” (147). God’s teaching, then, addresses each individually but calls upon each and every one to acknowledge enormously extended ties of responsibility with respect to the public sphere – which is explicitly the sphere of governmental power and imperial practice. The British nation is reconstrued as a vast assembly of private consciences, which are engaged personally, individually, but carefully directed to predetermined moral, social, and political conclusions. This is indeed a very “special” humiliation that the Indian rebellion occasions.

Although I have affirmed the ritual function of the fast-day discourses and have repeatedly emphasised the sermons’ affiliation with pre-established perspectives and positions, I do not wish to suggest that the fast-day speeches fail entirely to bring any newness into the mid-Victorian world. First, certainly, one needs to ascertain that India, in the sermon texts, fails to discover a political or cultural pertinence that might exceed or differ from the concerns and requirements of British imperial dominion. This point, however, is unsurprising. The sermons’ cultural work becomes really curious and interesting – and less predictable – when the discourse brings the Indian rebellion into close relationship with questions of identity. The cultural project of discovering anew England’s imperial destiny becomes bound tightly together with the more personal and individual project of discovering what it means to be English. These two projects are bound in turn to India. India, or at least an imagined India, makes its way into the most intimate zone of British subjectivity – the zone I’ve designated as conscience. Distant India now inhabits English interiority in a pressing and inescapable way.

### *The “Technologies” of Discourse*

A TRANSFORMATION in the structure of perception and understanding, which refashions Britain’s relationship with India, is most compellingly figured forth in the sermons in relation to telegraph, the newly developed, much-touted medium for international and intercontinental communication. George Wilson, one of telegraph’s early enthusiasts, gives expression, in 1852, to the utopian dreams with which the new technology rapidly became associated: “a network of wires . . . will one day connect together the ends of the earth; and, like the nerves of the human body, unite in living sympathy all the far-scattered children of men” (77). Communications theorists have noted the telegraph’s early, commonplace association with “universal communication” and its figural presentation as a wondrously extensive “social nervous system” (Czitrom 11; Carey 215). Very common, too, is the telegraph’s discursive mediation through “religious imagery” and “religious language” (Czitrom 11; Carey 204). The new technology was seen as providing mankind with a spiritual and specifically Christian boon; indeed, it was quickly understood as “the ideal device for the conquest of space and populations” (Carey 17) – most particularly, for spiritual, Christian conquest. H. L. Wayland,

another of the telegraph's early enthusiasts, affirms in 1858 that the telegraph "gives the preponderance of power to the nations representing the highest elements in humanity"; it favors "the civilized and Christian nations." Placed in such knowing and beneficent hands, moreover, the telegraph promises an end to "old prejudices and hostilities" through a miraculous facilitation of "an exchange of thought between all the nations of the earth" (qtd. in Rowland 68).

The texts of the sermons clearly demonstrate the preachers' awareness of the contemporary discourse of the telegraph. However, their engagement with this discourse is selective, and it seems, moreover, to play upon the telegraph's failure to fulfill the brightest promises of its moral and spiritual value. The preachers give no word to hopes of freer exchange of ideas, of universal sympathy, of a newly enabled (enduringly hierarchized) brotherhood of men. At least momentarily, the telegraph-borne news from India flies in the face of such themes. However, the preachers make noteworthy use of other established elements of telegraph discourse: the mystical, mysterious energy of the telegraph, its spiritual, religious associations, and its conception as a kind of nervous system. Maguire, in his sermon, asks, "What is this news, borne as with lightning speed, and with worse than a lightning stroke, bringing tidings to many a home and many a heart that cannot perhaps in this world be bound up again" (45). Rev. Dale affirms, "The electric touch vibrates at the interval of many thousand miles in the inmost heart of our own metropolis" (38). In both these evocations of telegraph communication, the medium is understood, and rhetorically presented, as a collapsing of distance through speed – an achievement that, as I pointed out earlier, is mythic rather than real. Maguire evidently understands telegraphic immediacy in the most literal way: it is unmediated, a direct, penetrating "stroke." The telegraph allows news from India to penetrate, shatteringly, into the private recesses of English homes and hearts. For Dale, a shivering contact with the "inmost heart" is accomplished by the "electric touch," which elsewhere appears as a "magic whisper" (Wright 11). In several sermons the telegraphic signal is figured as a vibrant "pulse." Figures such as these, which activate in close association the spiritual and nervous associations of telegraph technology, conspire with other elements of the fast-day sermons to structure "Mutiny" news as intimate experience; these figures show the degree to which tumultuous India has etched itself – etched itself enduringly – upon the map of the English imagination.

The sermons' capacity to recruit rhetorically the telegraph – that most startling, unprecedented technical innovation of the mid-Victorian period – attests, I think, to the history-forging intensity of the discursive moment. The centrality of the Crystal Palace in the fast-day proceedings, which I noted earlier, is similarly suggestive and compelling. As Thomas Richards has argued, the Palace's innovative design distributes, organizes, and coordinates the British public's encounter with and understanding of their heteroclytic world; it displays "a coherent representational universe" (4). The Palace presents itself almost as a material metaphor for imperial actuality, obscuring distinctions between inside and outside, containing the world, even the natural world – birds, trees, and other landscape elements – in a spectacularly artificial and transparent structure.<sup>5</sup> This architectural embodiment of the theme of transparency associates readily, moreover, with the moral mission of imperial enterprise, suggesting a world-embracing clarity, a shadowlessness, a definitive triumph over the various forms of doubt. The Palace symbolises more powerfully than any other monument or artefact the mid-Victorian belief in "unfettered progress" (Bird 1). However, it must be observed that the Palace stages the *problem* of a far-flung global empire at least as much as it demonstrates a kind of representational, taxonomic mastery of that empire. As Richards

notes, the Palace, which from the outside view presents a world contained in glass, from the inside view overwhelms with the world's "profusion," fracturing and exhausting the gaze (23). The Palace manifests system and phantasmagoria, imperial desire's organization and its derangement. It is a theatre for the ritualized experimentation of social action in modern terms, a spectacularization of English culture and its world-embracing power – in Richards's terms, "a new kind of political theatre" (54–55). Yet it is a theatre of paradox, staging power's extensions and also its vulnerabilities, the marvels of empire's reach but also the uncertainties of its grasp. The Palace, in brief, provides the perfect "main stage" for a national negotiation and reordering of a British Empire suddenly, alarmingly, in turbulence; it is *the* place where imperial mastery needs, once again, to be proclaimed.

*The Fast-Day and the "Mutiny": Defining the Event*

THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS of the fast-day include much talk of the "heart of the nation," which, states the *Daily News* of October 8, "has been profoundly stirred" (4). The *Times* of October 10 affirms that "every heart is stung," and confidently adds, "we all feel that the cause is our own" (6); The *Illustrated London News* of the same day echoes this sense, extolling as "remarkable" the occurrence of "One sentiment pervading a great nation" (358). Thus, the newspaper commentary coordinates itself with the sense, communicated in many of the sermons, that the "Mutiny" has been, and needs to be, taken up as a national cause, yet a national cause that has been, and needs to be, experienced in personal, intimate terms. The press locates, moreover, in the fast-day proceedings a noteworthy development in Britain's political life. The *Daily News* of October 8 observes of the fast-day proceedings, "It is by such private exercises that men nerve themselves for the duties of private life; it is by such public and social exercises that nations nerve themselves for their mightier undertakings." The sermons have served "to elevate the work which lies before us as a nation to the rank of a religious duty" (4). Following a very similar argumentative line, the *Morning Post* affirms: "Such days as yesterday are good for us all in our individual capacity, and are also good for us in our collective capacity as a nation." The same commentary goes on to argue the need "to examine ourselves minutely" (4), thus aligning itself very clearly with the sermons' call for the activation of British consciences. The *Times* observes, "What is called public opinion is taking in hand Indian affairs," and this represents "a new and important phase in the politics of this country" (6). The *Times* goes on to note the intensification of British focus upon distant India, affirming that "India, once riven open to our eyes, and the subject of audacious and indefatigable scrutiny, will not soon be laid aside. The events and disclosures of this year will give an impetus to feeling, to curiosity, and enterprise which none of us will live to see flagging" (6). This India, almost horrifically "riven open" to British scrutiny, clearly has been confirmed as a compelling object of attention and emotional, imaginative investment. But just as clearly, one gets a sense that England, that Englishness, have been riven open, exposed in depth; the heart of England, that composite of the attuned and harmonized hearts of Englishmen, has been rediscovered through a new and unsettling discovery of India.

"The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon," reports the *Times* of October 8, "addressed yesterday, at the Crystal Palace, the largest audience that has assembled in modern times to listen to the exhortations of a minister of the gospel" ("Crystal Palace"). The pulpit, set high above the heads of the congregants, had been brought specially from Surrey-gardens and positioned "at the north-east corner of the central transept at its junction with the nave." One learns

also that “the thousands of seats which had been here disposed, were soon engaged. Those portions of the galleries . . . within range of the speaker’s voice were speedily filled, and the large orchestra was crowded even to the backmost bench.” The *Times* writer concludes his description of the scene affirming, “it is scarcely possible that a more animated and enthusiastic audience could have been assembled” (“Crystal Palace”). One can readily detect in this report the recognition of an Event – or at the very least the will to create one. And indeed, if one pictures Spurgeon pulpitted above the immense throng of his listeners, with the luminescent nave before him and the great wings of the Palace stretching away on either side; if one attends to the necessarily halting yet stentorian tones with which an unmiked speaker addresses 24,000 (“THERE ARE – SUCH THINGS – AS NATIONAL – JUDGMENTS”); if one thoughtfully reconstructs this discursive situation, it is difficult to see something other than a moment of cultural condensation, a moment that consolidates and congeals a particular assembly of notions that previously have only been bruited and circulated, debated, upheld or rejected, pushed toward or away from the resonant centres of public speech. On that autumn afternoon in 1857 the mid-Victorian era engaged in defining its world, in forging its truths – about Englishness, about Indianness, about the relationship between England and India. These newly authorized truths were then bequeathed to the later nineteenth and even the twentieth century, finding their way, as traces and as larger structures of thought and vision, into the many subsequent writings of the meaning of the British Empire and, more particularly, of those events known as the “Mutiny.”

*Bilkent University*

## NOTES

1. I place “Mutiny” in quotation marks in my title and throughout my text. My intention is to recall that such a naming of the 1857 rebellion is already an interpretation, and one that has been cogently questioned, notably by the historians Chaudhuri and Stokes, both of whom find their place within my argument. However, I retain this naming in my text as it is, throughout the Victorian era and in the early twentieth century, the most common and recognizable way of referring to the 1857 uprisings in India.
2. The Duff letters I speak of were first posted to private correspondents, then promptly published in the periodical press, then finally collected, sequentially and with dates still in place, in book form. It is from the book that I take my quotations.
3. Preachers who frankly query the logic of the proclamation are rare. However, Gleadow, speaking at the relatively low-profile Foundling Chapel, quite frankly sets his speech at odds with the “judgment” idea, stating that he is not “at liberty” to decide “whether and how far these calamities in India are a judgment from heaven” (3).
4. Criticism of the cry for vengeance is not entirely absent in the press coverage, though such cries greatly outnumber the correctives they meet. In “Notes of the Week,” the *ILN* of October 3 records that Disraeli has spoken against the urge to vengeance, stating that it is at odds with the values of a “Christian nation” (339). However, in an earlier *ILN* of September 19, “The War in India” voices a complaint about “a certain class of humanitarians” who speak against the general “call for vengeance,” thus suggesting that debate exists but also that the said “humanitarians” are very much a minority (282).
5. Concerning the Palace’s association with empire, Richards notes that the distribution of its elements unmistakably places England in a position of preeminence among nations. For the Great Exhibition

of 1851 the Palace's exhibits were divided between an "English half" and a "foreign half," and as Richards observes, the latter was but "a mutilated copy" of the former. The structuring of display effectively "balkanized the rest of the world" (25).

### WORKS CITED

- Ball, Charles. *The History of the Indian Mutiny*. 2 vols. London: The London Printing and Publishing Company, n. d. [1858].
- Bird, Anthony. *Paxton's Palace*. London: Cassell, 1976.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
- Campbell, Sir Colin. *Narrative of the Indian Revolt from its Outbreak to the Capture of Lucknow*. London: George Vickers, 1858.
- Carey, James W. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- "The Cawnpore Massacres." *Times* 30 Sept. 1857: 6.
- Chaudhuri, Sashi Bhusan. *English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny, 1857–59*. Calcutta: World P, 1979.
- "Crystal Palace." *Times* 8 Oct. 1857: 8.
- Cumming, Rev. Dr. Untitled text in *The Fast-Day Sermons*. 17–30.
- Czitrom, Daniel J. *Media and the American mind : from Morse to McLuhan*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1982.
- Daily News*. Unsigned, untitled editorial. 8 Oct. 1857: 4.
- Dale, Rev. T. Untitled text in *The Fast-Day Sermons*. 31–41.
- "The Debate on India." *Illustrated London News* 1 Aug. 1857: 105–06.
- Duff, Rev. Alexander. *The Indian Rebellion: Its Causes and Results*. New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1858.
- Evening Herald*. Unsigned, untitled editorial. 29 Sept. 1857: 2.
- The Fast-Day Sermons. The "Indian Mutiny": Twelve Sermons, Delivered on Wednesday, October 7, 1857*. London: J. A. Berger, 1857.
- Gleadall, Rev. J. W. "The Day of Humiliation: Foundling Chapel." *Morning Post* 8 Oct. 1857: 3.
- Guha, Ranajit. "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency." *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. 45–86.
- "H. P." Letter. *Times* 8 Sept. 1857: 8.
- Hibbert, Christopher. *The Great Mutiny: India, 1857*. New York: Penguin, 1980.
- Illustrated London News*. Unsigned, untitled editorial. 4 July 1857: 49–50; 1 Aug. 1857: 114; 10 Oct. 1857: 358.
- "Juggernaut." *Illustrated London News* 5 Sept. 1857: 234.
- Lloyd, Julius. *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army*. London: Bell and Daldy, 1857.
- Maguire, Rev. R. Untitled text in *The Fast-Day Sermons*. 43–53.
- Masters, John. *Nightrunners of Bengal*. London: Penguin, 1955.
- Mill, James. *The History of British India*. 2nd ed. 6 vols. London: Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, 1820.
- M'Neile, Rev. Hugh. Untitled text in *The Fast-Day Sermons*. 1–15.
- Morning Post*. Unsigned, untitled editorial. 8 Oct. 1857: 4.
- "The News from India." *Illustrated London News* 3 Oct. 1857: 329–30.
- "Notes of the Week." *Illustrated London News* 8 Aug. 1857: 135; 22 Aug. 1857: 195; 3 Oct. 1857: 339.
- "Our Weekly Gossip." *Athenaeum* 10 Oct. 1857: 1269–70.
- Richards, Thomas. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851 – 1914*. London: Verso, 1990.

- Rowland, Wade. *Spirit of the Web: The Age of Information from Telegraph to Internet*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1999.
- Seton, Rosemary. *The Indian "Mutiny", 1857–58: A Guide to Source Material in the India Office Library and Records*. London: The British Library, 1986.
- Sharpe, Jenny. *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- Sinclair, Ven. Archdeacon. Untitled text in *The Fast-Day Sermons*. 83–94.
- Sortain, Joseph. *The Indian Mutiny: A Sermon*. Brighton: R. Folthorp, Royal Library, 1857.
- Spurgeon, Rev. C. H. *Our National Sins*. London: Partridge, 1857.
- Stokes, Eric. *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*. Ed. C. A. Bayley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.
- Stowell, Rev. Canon. Untitled text in *The Fast-Day Sermons*. 139–48.
- Thompson, Edward. *The Other Side of the Medal*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1989.
- Times* of London. Untitled, unsigned editorial. 6 Oct. 1857: 6; 7 Oct. 1857: 8; 10 Oct. 1857: 6.
- Victoria, Queen of England. "Proclamation." *Morning Post* 28 Sept. 1857: 4.
- "The War in India." *Illustrated London News* 19 Sept. 1857: 281–82.
- Ward, Andrew. *Our Bones Are Scattered*. London: John Murray, 1996.
- Weale, Rev. Morey. *The Indian Rebellion – How a National Judgment?* London: Longman, Brown, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857.
- Wilson, George. *Electricity and the Electric Telegraph: Together with the Chemistry of the Stars*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852.
- Wright, Rev. William. *A Sermon Preached at Christ Church, Kensington*. London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1859.