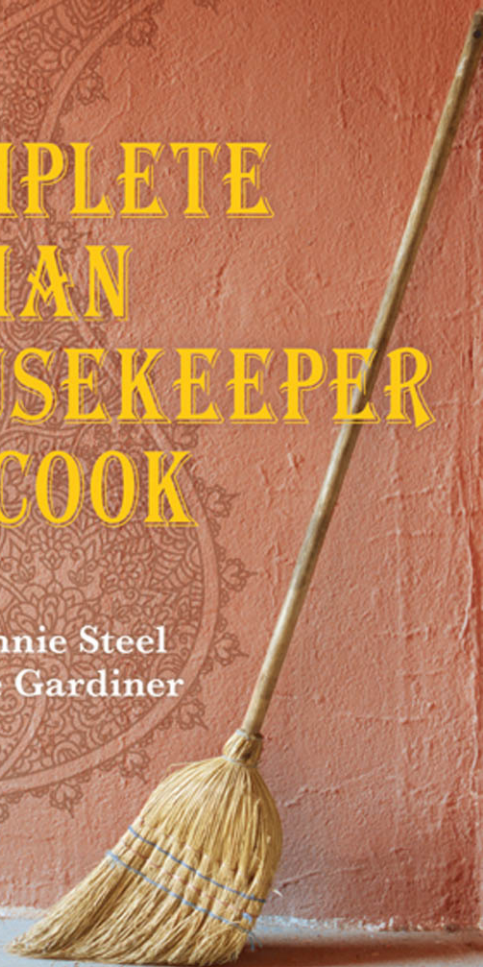


The
**COMPLETE
INDIAN
HOUSEKEEPER
and COOK**

Flora Annie Steel
& Grace Gardiner



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FLORA ANNIE STEEL &
GRACE GARDINER

THE COMPLETE
INDIAN
HOUSEKEEPER
AND COOK



Edited by

RALPH CRANE AND ANNA JOHNSTON

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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	ix
<i>Note on the Text</i>	xxviii
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	xxx
<i>A Chronology of Flora Annie Steel</i>	xxxii
THE COMPLETE INDIAN HOUSEKEEPER & COOK	I
<i>Explanatory Notes</i>	311
<i>Glossary</i>	335
<i>Index</i>	341

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INTRODUCTION

How could ‘the English girls to whom fate may assign the task of being house-mothers in our eastern empire’ survive but with a copy of Flora Annie Steel and Grace Gardiner’s *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* packed carefully in their steamer trunks? From the moment they arrived in India—often newly married, inexperienced in both travel and housewifery, and suffering the culture shock that still confronts first-time visitors to India—these young women were on display as flag-bearers of imperial British standards. Imagine their horror when, on entering their new home, they found ‘The kitchen is a black hole, the pantry a sink. The only servant who will condescend to tidy up is a skulking savage with a reed broom’ (p. 6). What was an English girl to do?

Fortunately, Steel and Gardiner had plenty of specific, practical, and highly opinionated advice to give the girl who suddenly found herself a memsahib. They could explain how to ‘make a hold’ over her servants, how to establish and stock a storeroom, how to plan a menu, manage young children, treat bites from ‘mad, or even doubtful dogs’, and teach an Indian cook how to make fish quenelles. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* promised its reader a comprehensive guide to domesticity in India, even if she found herself living in camps or in the jungle, on the hills or in the plains, whether she was the wife of an influential Indian Civil Service officer or a missionary.

The authors wrote from their extensive residences in India, in a variety of regions and domestic circumstances. Steel was by far the senior partner in terms of the actual writing of the book: it formed an early part of her professional writing career, and it is her biography that dominates our subsequent discussion. But Gardiner brought her own experiences to the book, and so the reader gets a rounded, binocular view of British India. Gardiner had come to India in the 1860s in her early twenties with her husband John William Gardiner, who had joined the Indian Civil Service in 1864, and brought up a large family in India. Sections of the book clearly draw on Gardiner’s expertise rather than Steel’s two years with her only child before Mabel was left with relatives to be brought up ‘at home’. Indeed, across

the editions of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, we see Gardiner's children growing up: by 1904, they include a 'fully qualified M.D., and another an Associate of the Sanitary Institute, and a *ci-devant* health visitor' who are rather dismissive of their mother's dated views on parenting.¹ The commentary continually draws on the two women's lived experience in various parts of India. So we learn, between the lines, about a six-week-old baby being vaccinated by the Civil Surgeon on the Mall in Simla, about being caught without provisions on an upcountry train trip to Karachi 'where on one occasion the writer was twenty-four hours without the possibility of procuring anything but whisky and soda and a biscuit' (pp. 218–19), and about repeated failures in cooking potted sheep's head, a result indignantly found to be caused by the head being skinned by the cook before cooking. These compelling glimpses of a woman's life under the Raj provide much of the charm and interest of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* for the contemporary reader, and must have ensured its popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, creating a demand which warranted its many editions and reprints.

Flora Annie Steel

Flora Annie Webster (1847–1929) was born at Sudbury Priory, Harrow, on 2 April 1847, the sixth child and second daughter (of eleven children) of George Webster, the Scottish Parliamentary Agent, and Isabella (née MacCallum), heiress to a Jamaican plantation.² When Flora was three years old the failure of the Australasian Bank and her father's subsequent bankruptcy, which included the loss of his wife's substantial fortune, forced the family to move to a small villa overlooking the Harrow School cricket pitch. In 1856 her father, whose reputation appears to have survived his bankruptcy, was appointed sheriff-clerk of Forfarshire in Scotland and the family moved to Burnside, a large old country house near Forfar, where Flora would live until she married.³ Apart from six months at a school in Brussels when she was 13, Steel was educated at home,⁴ where her

¹ *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (London: Heinemann, 1904), 163.

² Violet Powell, *Flora Annie Steel: Novelist of India* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 1.

³ Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity* (1929; Gurgaon: Vintage Books, 1993), 16.

⁴ *Ibid.* 23.

mother encouraged her interests in amateur theatricals, reading, painting, singing, music, sewing, and other handicrafts.

On 31 December 1867 Flora married Henry William Steel, who was home on leave from the Indian Civil Service, and whom she had previously met as a three-year-old at a children's party and again while he was an undergraduate at Cambridge. Twenty-four hours later, on New Year's Day 1868, Flora and her new husband set sail for India, where she would spend the next twenty-two years of her life, chiefly in the Punjab, including lengthy periods of residence in Ludhiana, Dalhousie, and Kasur, near Lahore.

Henry was one of the new generation Indian Civil Service (ICS) officers, 'competition wallahs' who had come through a revised recruitment system that favoured intellectual over practical achievement.⁵ Appointed at the lowest position in the executive branch of the Indian Government—Assistant Commissioner (3rd grade)—Henry reported to the Deputy Commissioner (known as the District Officer or Collector in other provinces). He would have assisted his superior in a wide range of tasks, for the Deputy Commissioner held executive power and was the key administrative figure in his district, acting as chief magistrate, principal revenue officer, and responsible for the police, the jail, the law courts, forests, roads, schools, hospitals, fences, canals, and agriculture.⁶ Until he had passed his departmental exams—which focused on language acquisition, judicial process, revenue and treasury—Henry could only try small cases, imposing limited fines and prison sentences. The Punjab was seen as a plum posting (along with the North-Western Provinces), and among the provinces it had a reputation for paternalist if benevolent dictatorship, as a frontier state which had developed a characteristically mobile and locally engaged ICS culture. Crucially, the Punjab had 'held' during the 1857 Indian Mutiny and its Sikh troops had assisted in the recapture of Delhi, thus the region was to some degree sheltered from the aftermath of the Uprising. Henry had first joined the ICS in 1862, so all his service was under the post-Mutiny structure of government, which saw the Governor-General, now usually known as the Viceroy, maintaining governance but with oversight from both the

⁵ For a fascinating study of ICS culture see David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (London: John Murray, 2005).

⁶ *Ibid.* 90–1.

Secretary of State in Whitehall and the Council of India, a group of mostly retired officials who advised the Secretary at the India Office. Thus Henry joined a chain of command, through the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, that was headed now by the British Government, rather than the East India Company. He represented the new ICS man: more accountable and less dependent on patronage for advancement.

The Steels' first posting was to Ludhiana, but the following April it was decided that, in view of her experiences of fever during the last hot weather, the now pregnant Flora should take a house in Kasauli, in the hills 90 miles away, where her husband would visit her each weekend. In July 1868 Henry suffered a particularly debilitating dose of fever and, through the good offices of Colonel Reynell Taylor, the Commissioner of the Punjab, the couple were posted to the hill station of Dalhousie where Flora gave birth to a stillborn daughter.⁷ She gave birth to a second daughter, Mabel, on 10 December 1870, by which time she was actively involved in station life.

From this point on Flora convincingly played the role of *burra memsahib* to her rapidly promoted husband, and whenever they were posted to larger stations where there was a lively Anglo-Indian community she occupied herself with the organization of various community activities including theatricals and musical events. When the Steels were posted to remote stations where there were few or no other Europeans, Flora refused to succumb to the boredom experienced by many colonial wives who, like Olivia Rivers in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975), found themselves faced with endless hours of idle domesticity. Instead she immersed herself in the local culture, learning to speak, read, and write Punjabi and the local language of whatever area her husband was posted to, and committed herself to improving the lives of the local native women. Flora regularly accompanied her husband on his tours of the districts that came under his charge; acted as a (self-taught) doctor to the local women and children, which gained her entry to a world hidden to most Europeans; instituted her own reading classes at the local boys' school in Kasur, where she was later invited by the Indians to help establish a school for girls, the first of many schools she started; worked on various health and education committees; designed the town hall

⁷ Powell, *Flora Annie Steel*, 17.

in Kasur; assisted in the revival of traditional handicrafts (which even then were being threatened by Western commercialism), producing an illustrated monograph on *phulkari* embroidery which was published by the India Office;⁸ and for a time was vice-president of the 'Victoria Female Orphan Asylum' in the Punjab.

In 1884 Flora was appointed Inspectress of Schools, with responsibility for girls' schools in an area of over 140,000 square miles that stretched from Peshawar to Delhi, and between 1885 and 1888 she served on the Provincial Education Board. As an active member of the Board, Flora introduced reforms and rewrote school primers, which were illustrated by another Board member, John Lockwood Kipling, the father of Rudyard Kipling. She shocked the Anglo-Indian community by living apart from her husband for a year in order to complete the term of her own public appointment as Inspectress of Schools. Henry was deliberately transferred to the other end of the Punjab in response to his wife pressing for an inquiry into rumours of corruption at the new Punjab University in Lahore, a pet project of the then Governor, after she learnt that a junior official in the Forest Department who could barely read or write had been awarded a diploma.

It is tempting to privilege Flora's portrayal of India and Indians, to be seduced by what Jonah Raskin, writing about Kipling's *Kim*, calls 'the illusion of intimacy'.⁹ Certainly in theory, the nature of her life in India gave Flora an unusual insight into the lives of Indian women in particular and into native life in general. But as Jenny Sharpe reminds us, 'Flora Annie Steel, perhaps more than anyone else, embodies the memsahib in all of her contradictions.'¹⁰ While she made a genuine attempt, in all her Indian writing, to interpret the country and its culture through Indocentric rather than Eurocentric eyes, she remained an ardent supporter of Empire and her knowledge of India was ultimately used to support Britain's imperial hold on the country.

Much of the knowledge that Steel gathered during her twenty-two years in India would find its way into the only two books she published before leaving the country in 1889: *Wide Awake Stories* (1884),

⁸ Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity*, 115–16.

⁹ Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1971), 103.

¹⁰ Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 93.

a volume of folk tales written for children with notes by Captain R. C. Temple (published in England in 1894 as *Tales of the Punjab*, with expanded notes by Temple and illustrations by J. Lockwood Kipling), and a domestic manual she wrote with her friend Grace Gardiner. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, first published in 1888—which she began compiling while living in Kasur, a remote subdivision where the Steels were posted a year or so after Flora's arrival in India¹¹—was produced as a guide for the many young women who, like the young Steel and Gardiner, found themselves thrust into a position of responsibility for the Anglo-Indian home.

The Anglo-Indian Memsahib

At the time Steel and Gardiner wrote *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* in the third quarter of the nineteenth century the British Raj in India was at its height. The Victorian British, whether they served in the Civil or the Military, believed they were in India as rulers, and to do their duty. Their wives were expected to share in the civilizing mission of Empire. But for many women, India was a frightening place, which they ignored as far as was possible, retreating into their own closed, Anglo-Indian community where, as Margaret MacMillan puts it, 'they attempted to keep Britain alive in the midst of India'.¹² To do this they devised a complicated set of social customs—wonderfully caricatured in George Atkinson's *Curry and Rice: The Ingredients of Social Life at 'Our Station' in India*,¹³ a series of satirical sketches of small-station life in the mid-nineteenth century—that both distanced them from the culture shock of India and provided a level of comfort through the dull routines they offered.

The primary role of the memsahib was to keep house: to supervise the housekeeping while doing few domestic tasks herself. The morning, the coolest part of the day, was usually the time reserved for this task. Otherwise a typical day for a memsahib—whose husband would have risen early and would be at work for most of the day—might

¹¹ Pat Barr, *The Memsahibs: The Women of Victorian India* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), 152.

¹² Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 13.

¹³ George Francklin Atkinson, *Curry and Rice: The Ingredients of Social Life at 'Our Station' in India* (1859; Chennai: Rupa and Co, 2001).

begin with a ride before breakfast, which would be followed by a cold bath before dressing to receive visitors to exchange gossip and drink lime sodas for up to four hours. A late lunch, or tiffin, which would usually run into several courses, would, contrary to the advice given in *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, often be followed by a siesta (which might simply be lying on her bed with a book, trying to keep cool), before a late afternoon ride, another bath, dressing again, and another round of visiting. In the evening she would dress for dinner (even when in camp), which again consisted of several courses (typically soups, fish, joints, puddings, and savouries), and perhaps conclude the day with songs around the pianoforte. Many became bored with this routine, and took up sketching, collecting dried flowers, or similar activities, to fill in their endless hours of leisure time.

The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook sought to provide practical guidance to young memsahibs in India, 'giving the duties of mistress and servants, the general management of the house and practical recipes for cooking in all its branches' (title page). The first nineteen chapters on 'household management' cover everything from the duties of the mistress and the duties of the various servants, details about keeping livestock and maintaining a garden, to the specific challenges faced by Europeans residing on the hills, in the plains, living in camps and jungles, and working as missionaries. The second half of the book provides advice on cooking and recipes for a range of European cuisine, from soups to ices, and one short chapter on 'native dishes'. Together, these two parts of the book provide, in Steel and Gardiner's own words, 'the knowledge really required by a mistress [which] is of that half-practical, half-theoretical and wholly didactic description, which will enable her to find reasonable fault with her servant' (p. 220). *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* gave knowledge to the new memsahib by demystifying the Anglo-Indian household, which in turn gave her power over her servants.

The voice that emerges from the pages commands the reader's attention. Brisk, capable, humorous, strong-minded, and frequently ironic, it brings the English girl into a companionable association with other memsahibs, even if she is isolated on an out-station. It is unmistakably Steel's voice, familiar from her short stories, novels, and autobiographical writing, leavened with Gardiner's experience. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* shows Steel's modern thinking on women's capacities. She 'strenuously denies' that,

'*per se*, an Englishwoman cannot stand the hot weather as well, and perhaps better than a man' (p. 196). She believes that women are 'far more capable of undertaking the somewhat irritating drudgery of detailed accounts' and that 'middle-class households will run most economically, and what is more, most smoothly, where the man has the courage and trust to bring all his earnings to the woman' (p. 30). Managing a house is seen as a crucial test of a woman's character and intelligence: 'It is the fashion nowadays to undervalue the art of making a home; to deem it simplicity and easiness itself. But this is a mistake, for the proper administration of even a small household needs both brain and heart. A really clever woman always sees this, and, like George Eliot, the greatest of modern women, prides herself on being an excellent housekeeper' (p. 16). Steel is also funny: her account of the aggression saved by employing a thermantidote (an early air cooling machine) rather than a punkah wallah is now somewhat politically incorrect, but still amusing (p. 197), and the humour is often directed against Europeans as well as Indians. Smart little aphorisms pepper the practical advice: 'As to clothing, a woman who wishes to live up to the climate must dress down to it,' she states, advising against frills, furbelows, ribbons, and laces (p. 201). Steel's appealing voice and her sophisticated writing skills distinguish *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* from its competitors.

Throughout, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* is determined to enable the memsahib to replicate, as much as possible, British domestic practices in a foreign climate. It is English seeds that are planted in the gardens (p. 143), English dishes that are served at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and English standards that measure the duty of a mistress to her servants (p. 16). 'In regard to actual house-keeping, the authors emphatically deny the common assertion that it must necessarily run on different lines to what it does in England. Economy, prudence, efficiency are the same all over the world . . . Some modification, of course, there must be, *but as little as possible*' (p. 14). In this way British domestic practices were to be made universal, another component of the broader practices of 'raising up' other cultures to the high standards imperial proponents believed to be inherent in late Victorian British culture. The most demanding challenge for the memsahib was to insist on British ways of doing things against the experience and cultural assumptions of her Indian servants, and it was a battle royal that was played out daily in

Anglo-Indian households, if Steel and Gardiner provide a representative guide. But upholding standards was critical. Housekeeping in India had ‘a political and social as well as a domestic side’ (p. 5) and it was conceived of as a long-term project where ‘a few generations of training shall have started the Indian servant on a new inheritance of habit’ (p. 12). In this we see the ‘[a]utocratic high-handedness’ (p. 79) that feeds popular images of the culturally narrow-minded memsahib who refused to engage with the extraordinarily rich and diverse cultures that surrounded her home.

Yet at the same time there is evidence of a real delight in India and the opportunities it provided for British women. Explaining the benefits of spending the hot season up in the hill stations, Steel writes:

Going to the hills is not quite as simple a matter as going to the seaside in England, but then there are the delightfully hairbreadth risks and miraculous escapes as a pleasant excitement, and there is always something new and wonderful. . . . We feel our hearts bound at the sight of the distant snows, and the sweet smell of the pines and wild flowers; and they re-echo a glad alleluia: ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help’—and health! (p. 195)

Here is the other side of the Anglo-Indian memsahib, delighting in the adventures of travel in India, enjoying the risks and the novelties she encounters, and clearly engaged with the landscape that surrounds her. Similarly, in the chapters on camp life and jungle life, housekeeping challenges in these locations are seen to be thrilling rather than tiresome: indeed, the authors rather lament that the ‘days of real camp life are, it is to be feared, numbered’ (p. 148). Across these sometimes contradictory assessments of India and her people, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* reveals the complex and fascinating world of the memsahib.

The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook

Many nineteenth-century household manuals addressed the construction of the ideal middle-class home, and *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* followed this trend. *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, first published in 1861, addressed the middle-class domestic British woman and, in doing so, brought her into being as an idealized type. Then, as now, cookbooks constructed

a utopian domestic space—one which few achieved in precisely the prescriptive terms the books set out. But the idea of the bourgeois home presided over by the Victorian ‘angel in the house’ was crucial to imagining the British people and, by extension, the British nation. Isabella Beeton, like other authors, called on middle-class women to manage others—servants, other members of the household, and children—and developed a science of domestic management that could be taught and replicated, through both formal and informal systems of education.¹⁴ Although the Victorian domestic sphere was placed in ideological opposition to the public world of men, commerce, and growing industrialization, in practice the home was where women managed consumption and it was therefore a crucial unit of the economy. Managing the labour of working-class servants, balancing domestic accounts, and ensuring that middle-class families lived well, but within their means, the middle-class housewife acquitted her duties to the family, her husband, and the nation as part of the linked Victorian values of domesticity and imperialism.¹⁵

The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook transplanted those British values to colonial climes. Here, the housewife had to manage servants marked by both racial and class difference; here, the accounts were carried on in a foreign currency and supplies were procured through bazaars and importers; here, her responsibility to uphold standards was overlaid with imperial assumptions about racial and cultural superiority (and, by corollary, vulnerability to the strangeness of India). At home, Mrs Beeton had assured her that ‘Creatures of the inferior races eat and drink; man only dines . . . Dining is the privilege of civilisation.’¹⁶ Steel and Gardiner’s guide sought to provide the Anglo-Indian housewife living among those ‘inferior races’ with the means to sustain civilization in the face of colonial disorder: how to dine, rather than simply eat, in India.

Mostly Anglo-Indians of this era dined in remarkably similar ways to British families back home (interestingly, as Humble notes, Beeton

¹⁴ Margaret Beetham, ‘Of Recipe Books and Reading in the Nineteenth Century: Mrs. Beeton and her Cultural Consequences’, in Janet Floyd and Laurel Foster (eds.), *The Recipe Reader: Narratives—Contexts—Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 22.

¹⁵ Susan Zlotnick, ‘Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England’, *ibid.* 74.

¹⁶ *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, ed. Nicola Humble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 363.

included as many recipes from India as from Wales, Scotland, and Ireland combined¹⁷). The recipes in *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* show little evidence of the exotic landscape of their readers; instead, good, plain British cooking dominates. Earlier cookery during the East India Company era had engaged enthusiastically with Indian cuisine. ‘Wyvern’, for example, described the ‘molten curries and florid oriental compositions of the olden time’ in his *Culinary Jottings for Madras* (1878).¹⁸ After the Mutiny—which augured in an inexorable shift from a predominantly male Anglo-Indian culture to a more diverse group of memsahibs, missionaries, and other advocates for British cultural values—the favourite meal of Company and military men, curry and rice, gave way to a European-based cuisine mimicking the table of Victorian Britain, even down to the French influences of the day.¹⁹

One searches with little success for Indian ingredients and influences in *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*. A chapter on ‘Native Dishes’ was added to the 1898 edition, and, even then, only a meagre eight recipes were provided ‘by request’. The authors’ disregard for Indian cuisine is self-evident: ‘most native recipes are inordinately greasy and sweet, and . . . your native cooks invariably know how to make them fairly well’ (p. 305). Occasionally Steel and Gardiner substitute a local ingredient for a standard European equivalent: using green mangos for Greengage and Cherry Rings (p. 293) is a rare example. Generally, though, Anglo-Indians are directed to consume British cuisine and, even in India, to guard against Continental influences. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* sternly notes that, in the houses of adventurous gourmets in India, ‘one is often treated to a badly-cooked dinner in the style of a third-class French restaurant, even to the *hors d’œuvres*’ (p. 61). The concluding comment on the fashion of hybridizing English and French modes of breakfasting—‘when, as is often the case, the breakfast hour is English, there is no real reason why English fashions should not be adhered to in every way’ (p. 55)—can be taken as Steel and Gardiner’s maxim for Anglo-Indian cuisine in general. Menus and the style of

¹⁷ Ibid. p. xxix.

¹⁸ Wyvern [Colonel A. R. Kenney-Herbert], *Culinary Jottings for Madras* (1878; London: Prospect Books, 2008), 1.

¹⁹ Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 115, 159.

eating should be carefully assessed against British standards: women are warned against '[h]eavy luncheons or tiffins', consumed simply because hot weather seems to preclude any other activity (p. 57). And the pragmatic household economics of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* insists that families should live—and dine—within their means, just as they would in Britain: 'a family with £1200 a year at home would not dream of giving champagne and *pâte de foie gras*, or spending thirty shillings in preserved fruit, bonbons, &c., for a very *recherché* pudding. Why should it be done out here?' (pp. 60–1).

Steel and Gardiner's guide, like other similar household guides, provides the memsahib with detailed advice on the management of her Indian servants. The number and extent of her dependants was one of the features that most clearly distinguished Anglo-Indian and British households: David Gilmour estimates that the wife of an Assistant Under-Secretary in Whitehall would have employed three or four servants; in India, she would have been responsible for about forty people.²⁰ Indeed the authors devote a forty-six-page chapter (by far the longest in the book) to 'The Duties of the Servants', outlining in precise detail the roles of various servants, suggesting that the management of Indian servants was the key to being a successful memsahib, and that successful management was dependent on maintaining a position of imperial power and authority over her servants. They also advise their reader at the outset that 'The Indian servant is a child in everything save age and should be treated as a child; that is to say, kindly, but with the greatest firmness' (p. 12).

The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook repeatedly positions Indian servants as children, as other, and as representatives of a degenerate culture which urgently requires British uplift. Not only are Indians childlike, but they demonstrate 'a case of sheer ignorance of facts well known to an *English* child; and it must never be forgotten that this is not the exception, but the rule' (emphasis added, p. 80). Individual servants stand in for problems of Indian civilization, or its absence, so we are told that 'It would take page on page, chapter on chapter, to tell the many evil habits in which Indian cooks have been grounded and taught' (p. 79). These habits are darkly put down to *dustoor*, or custom: 'pervading all things broods the stifling, enervating atmosphere of custom, against which energy beats itself

²⁰ Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste*, 297.

unavailingly, as against a feather bed' (p. 6). In this way, Indian culinary and domestic practices are utterly elided: they are unmentionable because to detail them would attest to the richness and complexity of the traditional practices of everyday life, and would allow the possibility of cross-cultural adaptation and change. Anglocentric virtues must be made universal, through the manual's didactic regimes, in order to raise up the peoples of the Empire through domestic reform. The memsahib's duty, then, is not only to her particular household but to the other Anglo-Indian households present and future, who will employ properly trained servants, and beyond that to the Empire as a whole, which will benefit from a disciplined—in the Foucauldian sense—Indian underclass.

Dirt, disorder, and different cultural practices reverberate through *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* as threats to the universalized British domesticity that the handbook prescribes. These are the 'politics of contamination' that threaten the European colonial home as well as the bodies and minds of Anglo-Indians, and especially of Anglo-Indian children.²¹ These contaminations are both literal and metaphoric. The manual is much concerned about the cook stirring eggs into a rice pudding with his finger, and the *khitmutgar* saving on washing up by hastily wiping cutlery rather than using the full Victorian armoury at each meal, and the storage of milk in dirty sculleries 'where the floor reeks like a sink, or side by side with raw meat in a safe' (p. 113–14).

But these literal contaminations have disturbing moral connotations, and they trouble the high-handed and brisk tone of the manual. When Steel and Gardiner declare that 'Dirt, illimitable, inconceivable dirt must be expected, until a generation of mistresses has rooted out the habits of immemorial years' (p. 86), it is clear that it is not only physical dirt that is of concern. In every chapter, the memsahib is warned to guard against 'the native's capacity for uncleanness' (p. 114) and advised to discipline both herself and her servants in an obsessive regime of decontamination. In Victorian Britain, concerns about dirt led to increasing surveillance policing the borders between normal and dirty categories: categories of health, sexuality, and

²¹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 149.

money, for example.²² In India, race complicated such ideas: Victorian concerns with gender and class differences were amplified through categories of racial difference, so that '[d]irt, illimitable, inconceivable dirt' attested to the popular imperial notion that other races were further behind the Europeans in terms of development and progress in 'civilisation'.

Yet it is not only Indian custom against which the mistress must be vigilant. The whole first chapter of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* is devoted to 'The Duties of the Mistress' and here, as throughout the manual, the Anglo-Indian housewife is admonished by the authors. Against the tide of India, Steel and Gardiner chide, many women have failed to provide a bulwark of European standards. Throughout, lazy memsahibs and their domestic practices are roundly condemned, and particularly the 'absolute indifference displayed by many Indian mistresses, who put up with a degree of slovenliness and dirt which would disgrace a den in St. Giles, on the principle that it is no use attempting to teach the natives' (p. 11). Women who fail to learn Indian languages, by which to better instruct their servants, are castigated: 'No sane Englishwoman would dream of living, say, for twenty years, in Germany, Italy, or France, without making the *attempt*, at any rate, to learn the language' (p. 12). The authors tartly suggest European women in India need 'to ask themselves if a difference in longitude increases the latitude allowed in judging of a woman's intellect' (p. 12). Poor servants reflect directly on their mistress's intellect, character, and sympathy. Such judgements would have been common across metropole and colony but failing to maintain standards in Anglo-Indian homes has particular and pernicious consequences.

The future of British children was in the hands of the Anglo-Indian house-mother and, by extension, so too was the future of British civilization. The expansion of the Empire in the nineteenth century meant that measuring the birth rate, and the health, of the British at home and in the new colonies became crucial to measuring the success and status of the nation and its imperial vigour.²³ *The Complete Indian*

²² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 154.

²³ Gillian Whitlock, 'The Silent Scribe: Susanna and "Black Mary"', *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11 (1995), 249–60.

Housekeeper and Cook urged its readers to take their responsibilities for maintaining the health and well-being of their household seriously, for the home is 'that unit of civilisation where father and children, master and servant, employer and employed, can learn their several duties' (p. 16). But it also urges that 'Life holds higher duties' (p. 11), which should not be compromised by wasting excessive effort on supervising domestic labour. In India, as evidenced by Steel's extraordinarily varied experience, those higher duties could include involvement in all manner of administrative, social, and philanthropic programmes associated with the British Raj. Yet *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* is explicit in seeing home management as part of a continuum with those imperial duties outside the home.

Steel and Gardiner consider the effective administration of the private sphere as central to the effective administration of the public sphere, and they confidently assign the memsahib a central role in the colonial enterprise. Towards the close of 'The Duties of the Mistress', the mistress-to-be is reminded that 'an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire' (p. 18). And this, according to the authors, requires that the boundaries between ruler and ruled be clearly maintained, regardless of the intimacy of their daily contact.

Nowhere is this intimacy—and the ambivalence of relationships between Anglo-Indians and the Indians they ruled—more evident than in the rearing of children, the future leaders of the Raj. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* is as opinionated on this topic as one might expect:

Indian children are proverbially captious, disobedient, and easily thrown out of gear. . . . [W]e can only assure every young mother that there is no climatic reason whatever why discipline should be set aside in an Indian nursery, and that it is as possible to insist on cleanliness, decency, and order there as in an Indian pantry or cook-room. The whole secret lies in refusing to listen to the word *dustoor*, or custom. (pp. 94–5)

The chapter 'Hints on Management of Young Children' reveals significant revision and response to readers across the manual's many editions. Nursing, that is, breastfeeding, is very much the preference of the authors, even as the twentieth century dawns and new 'scientific' modes of formula feeding gain precedence. But whilst Steel and

Gardiner advocate mothers feeding their own children, the manual explains the mechanics of employing a wet-nurse, when necessary. Cashmiri women from Amritsar are the ideal, but those from Agra ‘have got a great name’ (p. 162). *Ayahs* or *dhaees* are servants with special needs, and hence enhanced status and, it becomes clear in the manual, considerable bargaining power. Steel and Gardiner are scrupulous in detailing the precise clothing one must provide for such women, as well as the cooking and eating utensils to which they are entitled (pp. 162–3). While the language in which they describe such women reveals an uncomfortably explicit commodification of ethnic types and racialized bodies—Cashmiris are to be preferred because they are ‘very amiable, get very fond of their charges, are simple in their ideas and unsophisticated, and not so grasping in their expectations’ (p. 162)—in other ways Steel and Gardiner are clearly more liberal than their compatriots. They insist that a wet-nurse must be allowed to see her friends, and warn that on no account must she ‘be treated as if she were merely an animated bottle’ (p. 162). That other Anglo-Indians might hold such attitudes becomes clear in later editions. Steel and Gardiner express serious disquiet about the correspondence they receive: ‘[t]he horror of native wet-nurses universally expressed, even by missionary ladies’, shocks them sufficiently to make a point of addressing their 1908 readers explicitly on the matter. They chide those ‘who profess to love the souls of men and women’ but who ‘find the bodies in which those souls are housed more repulsive than those of a cow or donkey or a goat’. It is purely ‘race prejudice’ to fear that ‘the milk of a native woman should contaminate an English child’s character’.²⁴ Their readers’ bigotry does, however, reveal the unsettling nature of bodily intimacy across racial boundaries as well as heightened sensitivities around the imperial child. Sir Bampfylde Fuller voiced the concerns of many when he warned: ‘India enfeebles white races that cling to her breasts’, using the metaphor of the wet-nurse to explain the dangers of the Indian climate for European constitutions.²⁵ One historian of the colonial frontier in the Australian colonies has pointed out that the space shared (and contested) by colonizer and colonized might be ‘as close

²⁴ *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1904), 176.

²⁵ Bampfylde Fuller, *The Empire of India* (London: Pitman, 1913), 196.

as the bed shared with an Aboriginal woman'.²⁶ Steel and Gardiner's chapter on children reminds us that the domestic sphere provided many opportunities for informal and potentially destabilizing contact between Indians and their imperial rulers, and that the balance of power inside the home was not always as predictable as *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* mandated.

Steel after India

Henry Steel retired from the Indian Civil Service on 1 May 1889, and only two hours after his pension became due the Steels set sail for home. Encouraged by a friend, Richard Gilles Hardy, who would later become Commissioner of Lucknow, to turn her Indian experiences into fiction,²⁷ the following year Steel published her first story, 'Lâl', in *Macmillan's Magazine*; in all she wrote over thirty books and, of the many novels and short stories she wrote, over half were concerned with Indian or Anglo-Indian life. Steel returned to India twice more before her death in 1929, and her novel on the Mutiny, *On the Face of the Waters*, was published in 1896 to great acclaim.

Steel and Gardiner first published *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* in India in 1888–9, and probably little anticipated its eager reception. Demand for copies, and letters from readers, ensured a constant stream of revisions and new editions published back home in Edinburgh and London (see the Note on the Text in this edition for details). The authors continually updated and upgraded their manual, incorporating innovations such as reproducing chapters on the duties of servants as cheap pamphlets in Urdu and Hindi that servants in training could read or have read to them.²⁸ New fashions in cooking are incorporated, for example the addition of a chapter on vegetarian cooking in 1904 (here, as always, Steel's astringent humour is revealed: 'The writer, though practically a vegetarian, fails to see any difference between killing a cabbage and killing a chicken'²⁹). Keeping details such as prices relevant was a constant problem, and Steel and Gardiner struggled, after they returned to England, to

²⁶ Jan Critchett, *A 'Distant Field of Murder': Western Districts Frontiers, 1834–1848* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990), 23.

²⁷ Powell, *Flora Annie Steel*, 67.

²⁸ *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1902), x.

²⁹ *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1904), 370.

make sense of letters from memsahibs that reported widely varying costs in the different provinces. Still, they remained committed to their vision of the ideal housewife, and were quick to condemn any who slipped from their high standards, reiterating in the 1909 edition that ‘this book premises a “woman’s desire to look well to the ways of her household”. It is not written for those who, in the words of a correspondent, “leave everything to my *khitmutghar*, and he manages everything”.’³⁰ The manual’s longevity and continued appeal was due to these careful efforts to remain up to date, and reading across the editions—which run for thirty-three years, from 1888 to 1921—it is possible to see the changes in India across this period. Issues such as health reveal this most dramatically, as the resourceful memsahib’s pharmacopeia is expanded with the increasing number of effective drugs available and then, as professional medical services were more widely established in India, those skills are diminished as emergency treatments of last resort. It is a process of modernization that is seen ambivalently and often regretfully through Western eyes. In 1909 *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* recalls with some nostalgia the early years of the British in India:

India is fast being westernised . . . Motors are more amusing than bullock carts. Telephones are a convenience; electric fans a joy.

But all these things cost money, and cost more relatively in India than they do in England. So, undoubtedly, the cost of living has gone up. But then the standard of personal comfort has also gone up; so we must not complain.

Is it not the gospel of civilisation?³¹

Steel and Gardiner, both representatives of and keen advocates for the modernizing, civilizing mission of late Victorian Britain, reveal here the complex set of emotions that India stirred in her colonial officials.

In all her books dealing with colonial life in India during the Raj, Steel displayed her knowledge of the country and its customs. But with hindsight, later assessments prove that the ‘so-called “knowledge” of India’ displayed in Steel’s fiction ‘does not so much involve an open-minded responsiveness towards the country as the seeking of a *practical* kind of knowledge, a way of dealing with Indian life and

³⁰ *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* (1909), viii.

³¹ *Ibid.*

people, and, by extension, of facilitating British rule'.³² The publication of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* certainly attests to the gathering of practical ways of dealing with the country, while also implicating household duties in the government of Empire.³³

Such criticisms remind us that Steel was a woman of her time, whose thinking was inevitably influenced by Victorian certainties about the superiority of the British race, and an absolute belief in the British Empire in general and the British Raj in India in particular. But it is also evident that she was not averse to questioning the *way* Britain ruled in India, or accepting that in time India would govern herself,³⁴ which set her apart from the majority of memsahibs in the late nineteenth century. Steel did not shut herself off from India like so many of her countrywomen, and she tried to meet Indians in an emancipated way, even if her relationship always remained a paternalistic one. It is also evident that she sometimes nettled the British authorities in India with her criticisms, and that she was greatly admired by Indian women and girls in the areas where she worked. In her autobiography Steel describes a brooch given to her by the women of Kasur: 'the round, gem-set brooch they gave me was given with the simple explanation that it was indeed a token, since every jewel in it had been taken from those worn by their womenkind',³⁵ and recalls 'a crowd of some three hundred veiled women on the platform of the railway station' who had gathered to honour her as she departed for home.³⁶

³² Anne Fernihough, 'Steel, Flora Annie', in Janet Todd (ed.), *Dictionary of British Women Writers* (London: Routledge, 1999), 643.

³³ Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 93.

³⁴ Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity*, 253.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 111.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 181.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

THE present text is that of the fourth edition, published by William Heinemann in 1898. The recipe chapters have been abridged, retaining over a third of the recipes in order to provide a representative selection which also keeps recipes of particular cultural and historical interest.

There were at least ten editions of Steel and Gardiner's domestic manual between 1888 and 1921. We have reproduced the 1898 edition because it represents the first full, revised version of the text that then served as the basis of later editions. Steel and Gardiner's prefatory comments about the editions are often misleading, perhaps because, prior to 1898, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* was effectively self-published: first in India, in 1888–9; then in Scotland in 1890. The first edition is not held by any major library in India or the United Kingdom, so the book printed by Frank Murray in Edinburgh in 1890 is effectively the first extant edition, produced, according to its authors, 'within a few months of the first'. A seemingly constant stream of correspondence from readers motivated ongoing revisions: the addition of an index and several new chapters, as well as the revision of earlier material. *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* was one of only two works published by Steel—the most experienced and accomplished writer—during her residence in India, although she would reflect on her Indian experiences throughout the rest of her life and her subsequent publications.

By 1898 the text included forty-three chapters, including important chapters on account-keeping, comparative costs at different stations, and the varieties of Anglo-Indian life led on the hills and in the plains. In 1898 the book was taken up by the publisher William Heinemann, who kept it in print (and continued to encourage revisions and new editions) for the next twenty-three years. The twentieth-century editions show rapid developments in domestic, medical, and agricultural technologies, as well as the changing experience of Britons posted to India. The 1898 edition represents the culmination of Steel and Gardiner's high imperial experience of the nineteenth-century British Empire, and as such provides a fascinating snapshot of the daily lives of Anglo-Indians under the Raj at its height.

The authors' occasional inconsistent spellings of Hindustani, Urdu, or other Indian language words have been retained; variant spellings are noted in the Glossary, which has been prepared with the aid of Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell's *Hobson-Jobson: An Anglo-Indian Dictionary* (1886; London: Routledge, 1986) and Ivor Lewis's *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs* (1991; Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). (Inconsistencies in the spelling or accenting of French and other European language words have also been retained.) In the course of the text the authors provide lists of common foods, essential kitchen utensils, common garden seeds, medicines, ingredients for various remedies, a table of measures, and the names of common Indian dishes and spices, together with their Hindustani or Urdu names. Various other words are clearly glossed as they appear in the text. These have not been repeated in the Glossary except where they appear elsewhere without a translation. The editors' comprehensive Explanatory Notes, which provide information that ranges across areas of cultural, historical, geographical, medical, and culinary interest, aim to provide sufficient background information to satisfy the reader's curiosity without overburdening him or her with detail. These notes are signalled with an asterisk in the text; all footnotes are by the authors.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF FLORA ANNIE STEEL

<i>Life</i>	<i>Historical and Cultural Background</i>
1847 2 April: Flora Annie Webster born at Sudbury Priory, Harrow, sixth of eleven children of George and Isabella Webster (née MacCallum).	Charlotte Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i> Emily Brontë, <i>Wuthering Heights</i>
1848	Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848–9). Marquis of Dalhousie appointed Governor-General of India; embarks on a series of annexations under the ‘Doctrine of Lapse’. Satara annexed. William Makepeace Thackeray, <i>Vanity Fair</i> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>
1849	Annexation of the Punjab. Jaitpur and Sambhalpur annexed.
1850 Family moves to small villa overlooking Harrow School cricket pitch.	
1851	Great Exhibition, a celebration of modern industrial technology and design, held in London.
1852	Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852–3) leads to the annexation of Lower Burma.
1853	William Arnold, <i>Oakfield</i>
1854	Crimean War (1854–6). Jhansi and Nagpur annexed.
1856 Flora’s father appointed sheriff-clerk of Forfarshire; family moves to Scotland and takes up residence at Burnside near Forfar. Flora is educated informally at home except for six months at a school in Brussels.	Earl Canning appointed Governor-General of India. Annexation of Awdh (Oudh). Hindu Widow’s Remarriage Act (India) allows widows to remarry and to enjoy all the rights of a married woman.

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| 1857 | <p>10 May: Indian Mutiny (1857–8) breaks out in Meerut. Matrimonial Causes Act (UK) allows divorce through the law courts. Under the terms of the Act, the husband has only to prove his wife's adultery, while the wife additionally has to prove her husband has committed incest, bigamy, cruelty, or desertion. Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras founded.</p> <p>Thomas Hughes, <i>Tom Brown's Schooldays</i></p> <p>R. M. Ballantyne, <i>The Coral Island</i></p> |
| 1858 | <p>Flora's eldest brother sails for India to take up a civilian post in Madras; her youngest brother born.</p> <p>Government of India Act transfers rule of India from Hon. East India Company to Crown. Earl Canning appointed Viceroy of India.</p> <p>Charles Ball, <i>History of the Indian Mutiny</i></p> |
| 1859 | <p>Charles Darwin, <i>On the Origin of Species</i></p> <p>J. S. Mill, <i>On Liberty</i></p> <p>Charles Dickens, <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i></p> <p><i>Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management</i> begins to appear in monthly parts.</p> |
| 1860 | <p>Macaulay's Indian Penal Code enacted. Introduction of Indian indentured labour to Natal (1860–1911).</p> <p>William Howard Russell's <i>My Diary in India in the Year 1858–1859</i></p> |
| 1861 | <p>8th Earl of Elgin appointed Viceroy of India. Indian Councils Act transforms the Viceroy's Executive Council into a miniature cabinet run on a portfolio system.</p> <p><i>Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management</i> published in volume form.</p> |

<i>Life</i>	<i>Historical and Cultural Background</i>
1863	Simla declared summer capital. Sir John Lawrence appointed Viceroy of India.
1864	The first of three Contagious Diseases Acts in Britain (also 1866 and 1869); intended to contain venereal diseases in garrison towns and ports, the Acts targeted working-class women. G. A. Lawrence, <i>Maurice Dering; or, The Quadrilateral: A Novel</i> A Lady Resident, <i>The Englishwoman in India</i>
1865	Lewis Carroll, <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>
1867 31 December: marries Henry William (Hal) Steel, a civil engineer on leave from the Indian Civil Service, in Scotland.	Second Reform Bill (UK) enfranchises all male householders and male lodgers paying £10 rent per year for unfurnished lodgings, doubling the electorate. Karl Marx, <i>Das Kapital</i> (vol. i)
1868 1 January: Flora takes ship for India with her husband. Henry Steel posted to Ludhiana where Flora experiences her first serious bout of fever. Transferred to the hill station of Dalhousie, where Flora gives birth to a stillborn daughter.	Wilkie Collins, <i>The Moonstone</i> James Grant, <i>First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny</i>
1869	Suez Canal opens. Birth of Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi. Earl of Mayo appointed Viceroy of India.
1870 10 December: birth of daughter, Mabel.	
1871 Posted to the isolated station of Kasur in the Lahore district, where the Steels are the only Europeans. Flora develops a keen interest in languages and customs of the local villagers.	Lewis Carroll, <i>Through the Looking-Glass</i>

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| 1872 April: Steels return home on leave; Mabel is left with relatives to be brought up 'at home'. | Earl of Northbrook appointed Viceroy of India.
Philip Meadows Taylor, <i>Seeta</i> |
| 1873 Back in Kasur Flora acts as doctor to the local women and children. She is invited to open the first girls' school in the district, cementing her role as an educationalist in India. In Kasur Flora also designed the Municipal Hall, and assisted in the revival of local handicrafts. | Famine in Bengal. |
| 1875 Flora lends her piano to the Government for use in the camp set up to accommodate the Royal Visit to the district. | October: Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) begins four-month-long visit to India. |
| 1876 Visits Kashmir with Henry and two male friends. | Earl of Lytton appointed Viceroy. |
| 1877 Flora and Henry leave Kasur. Home leave spent in Scotland, Oxford—where Flora met many influential figures of the day including Benjamin Jowett, John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)—and Italy. | Queen Victoria proclaimed Empress of India. |
| 1878 | Second Afghan War (1878–80).
Wyvern [Colonel Arthur Robert Kenney-Herbert], <i>Culinary Jottings for Madras</i> |
| 1879 | <i>Boys' Own Paper</i> first published.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Defence of Lucknow'
Mrs A. G. F. Eliot James, <i>A Guide to Indian Household Management</i> |
| 1880 | Marquis of Ripon appointed Viceroy of India. |
| 1881 Second visit to Kashmir with Henry. | |

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| 1883 Flora rushes home to Scotland but fails to see her mother before her death. Returns to India in autumn, bringing daughter, Mabel, and youngest sister, Daisy, with her. | Ilbert Bill allows Indian judges to try Europeans. |
| 1884 Third visit to Kashmir. Mabel returns home with her aunt in the winter. Flora appointed first female Inspectress of Schools in India. | Marquis of Dufferin and Ava appointed Viceroy of India. |
| <i>Wide-Awake Stories: A Collection of Tales Told by Little Children between Sunset and Sunrise in the Punjab and Kashmir</i> (with R. C. Temple) published. | |
| 1885 Returns home to settle Mabel in a school. Appointed to Provincial Education Board (1885–8). Appointed vice-president of the Victoria Female Orphan Asylum in the Punjab. | Indian National Congress founded.
Third Anglo-Burmese War.
H. Rider Haggard, <i>King Solomon's Mines</i> |
| 1886 | Annexation of Upper Burma.
Indian and Colonial Exhibition held in South Kensington, London.
Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, <i>Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases</i> |
| 1887 | Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.
Arthur Conan Doyle introduces Sherlock Holmes in <i>A Study in Scarlet</i> .
H. Rider Haggard, <i>She: A History of Adventure</i> |
| 1888 <i>The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook</i> (non-fiction), with Grace Gardiner, published. | Marquis of Lansdowne appointed Viceroy of India. Sikkim War.
Rudyard Kipling, <i>Plain Tales from the Hills</i> |

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| 1889 1 May: Henry retires from ICS. The Steels return to UK; settle in Scotland. | Rudyard Kipling returns to Britain from India. |
| 1890 First short story, 'Lâl', published in <i>Macmillan's Magazine</i> ; Flora contributes twenty stories to the magazine between 1890 and 1897. | Arthur Conan Doyle, <i>The Sign of Four</i> |
| 1891 | Age of Consent Act (India) raises the age of statutory rape for 'consenting' Indian brides from 10 years to 12. |
| 1892 Steels lease Dunlugas in Aberdeenshire. | Indian Councils Act expands the additional membership of the Viceroy's Executive Council to sixteen, of whom ten could be non-official, and increases their powers. |
| 1893 <i>From the Five Rivers</i> (stories) published; <i>Miss Stuart's Legacy</i> (novel) published. | G. A. Henty, <i>Rujub, the Juggler</i> |
| 1894 Flora returns to India alone to gather information for her novel on the Mutiny, leaving her husband and daughter to follow later. Meets Laurence Hope in Bombay. In Delhi Flora granted permission to examine the sealed archives of confidential papers relating to the Mutiny.
<i>The Flower of Forgiveness and Other Stories</i> (stories) published; <i>The Potter's Thumb</i> (novel) published; <i>Wide-Awake Stories</i> republished as <i>Tales of the Punjab Told by the People</i> . | 9th Earl of Elgin appointed Viceroy of India. |
| 1895 <i>Red Rowans</i> (novel) published. | |
| 1896 <i>On the Face of the Waters</i> (novel) published. The novel was rejected by Macmillan before being published by Heinemann. | |

- | <i>Life</i> | <i>Historical and Cultural Background</i> |
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| <p>1897 The Steels establish a temporary base in London, where Flora becomes a lioness of the literary world. Flora organizes a Diamond Jubilee Banquet at the Grafton Galleries for 120 distinguished women and an equal number of male guests.</p> <p><i>The Gift of the Gods</i> (novel) published; <i>In the Permanent Way</i> (stories) published; <i>In the Tideway</i> (novel) published.</p> | <p>Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.</p> |
| <p>1898 <i>The Modern Marriage Market</i> (non-fiction), with Marie Corelli, Lady June, and Susan, Countess of Malmsbury, published.</p> <p>With her husband and daughter Flora makes a final visit to India as the guest of an old friend, now the Commissioner of Lucknow; performs hostess duties for him and carries out research for her novel <i>Voices in the Night</i>.</p> | |
| <p>1899 Flora and her family move to Talgarth Hall, near Machynlleth, North Wales.</p> | <p>Marquess Curzon of Kedleston appointed Viceroy of India.</p> |
| <p>1900 Much against her parents' wishes, Mabel marries her cousin, John Edward (Jack) Webster, a member of the ICS, and goes out to India.</p> <p><i>Voices in the Night</i> (novel) published; <i>The Hosts of the Lord</i> (novel) published.</p> | |
| <p>1901</p> | <p>North-Western Frontier Province created. Accession of Edward VII.</p> <p>Rudyard Kipling, <i>Kim</i></p> |
| <p>1902</p> | <p>Joseph Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i></p> |
| <p>1903 Birth of Mabel's first child, Patrick Webster, at Talgarth.</p> <p><i>In the Guardianship of God</i> (stories) published.</p> | |

- | <i>Life</i> | <i>Historical and Cultural Background</i> |
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| 1904 | Co-operative Societies Act (India) enables formation of cooperatives for supplying Indian farmers with cheap credit. |
| 1905 | Earl of Minto appointed Viceroy of India. Partition of Bengal. |
| 1906 | All-India Muslim League formed. |
| 1907 | Rudyard Kipling awarded Nobel Prize for Literature.
A. E. W. Mason, <i>The Broken Road</i>
Maud Diver, <i>Captain Desmond, V. C.</i> |
| 1908 | Robert Baden-Powell, <i>Scouting for Boys</i> |
| 1909 | Government of India Act, commonly referred to as the Morley-Minto Reforms, allows the election of Indians to the various legislative councils in India for the first time.
Maud Diver, <i>The Englishwoman in India</i>
Chota Mem [Mrs C. Lang], <i>The English Bride in India, Being Hints on Indian Housekeeping</i> |
| 1910 | Accession of George V. Baron Hardinge of Penshurst appointed Viceroy of India. |