

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

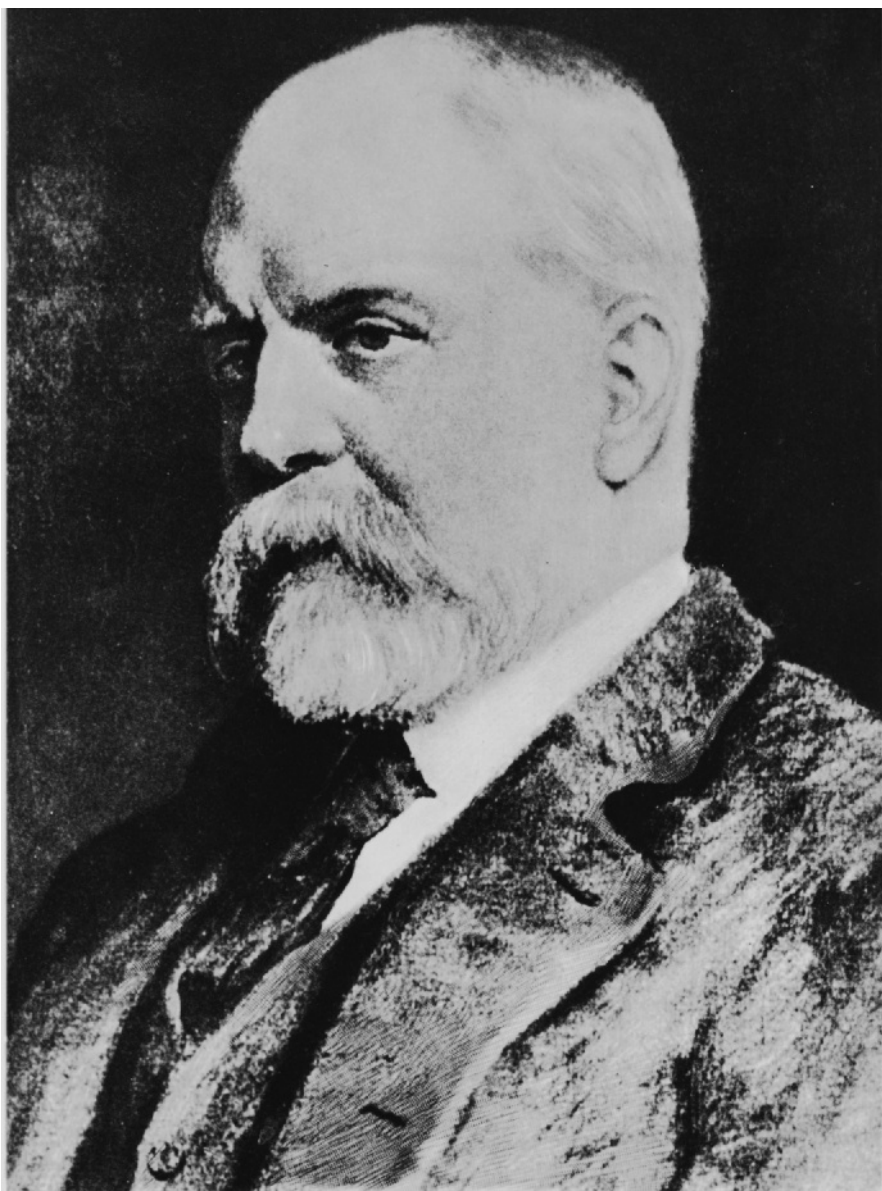


Valentine Chirol,
His Life and *The Times*

Linda B. Fritzing

I.B. TAURIS

Diplomat Without Portfolio



Valentine Chirol

Correspondent of The Times in Berlin 1892-1896

Head of the Foreign Department 1899-1912

Portrait of Chirol by the Honourable John Collier. Courtesy of Lady Margaret's School, Parsons Green, London.

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Valentine Chirol, His Life
and *The Times*

Linda B. Fritzing

I.B. TAURIS

LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2006 by I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
Website: <http://www.ibtauris.com>

In the United States and Canada distributed by Palgrave Macmillan,
a division of St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

Copyright © Linda B. Fritzingler 2006

The right of Linda B. Fritzingler to be identified as the author of this work has
been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents
Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any
part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval
system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of
the publisher.

ISBN 10: 1 84511 186 9
ISBN 13: 978 1 84511 186 1

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress
Library of Congress catalog card: available

Typeset in Stone Serif by Dexter Haven Associates Ltd, London
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Contents

Introduction		1
1	The Wages of Faith	3
2	A Worldly Education	17
3	Berlin	49
4	Betwixt and Between	89
5	The Foreign Department; Trial by Fire	110
6	Boers and Boxers	128
7	To Ally or Not or With Whom	150
8	Foreign Excitements, Domestic Discords	168
9	Eastern Alarms	195
10	Making Peace	224
11	Indian Discontents	249
12	New Politics, New Partners	274
13	Politics at Home, Abroad and at Printing House Square	302
14	New Beginnings, Old Problems	322
15	In and Out of the Foreign Room	354
16	Trouble and Disillusion, Near and Far	383
17	Morrison Loses His Temper, Chirol Loses Heart <i>The Times</i> Loses Chirol	410
18	Armageddon	447

Epilogue	472
Notes	483
Selected Bibliography	529
Index	541

For Camilla and Teddy

'Every work of art implies a previous process of assessment, and this process still remains the central problem of biography. But in so far as a biographer is also an historian, he should be very careful not to drown his subject's voice with his own. One function of biography is to show history as it was to the participant, to observe, for a moment, 'das Gewordene als Werdendes' – what has come to pass, while it is occurring. Through the individual peephole of the man whose life we are describing, we can see history in the course of being lived. In one sense, all organised histories are unsatisfactory, because they are written with what in Italy is called *il senno del poi*, wisdom after the event. But in individual lives we can seize, if nothing else, a vivid sense of actuality: it is a pity to blur it.'

Iris Origo, *A Need to Testify*; Four Portraits

Introduction: *The Times* of London and Sir Valentine Chirol

Once upon a time there was *The Times* of London. It was a very serious journal and its readers took it as such. Butlers ironed it before His Lordship's breakfast tray went up; it was snapped open in high-ceilinged club rooms along Pall Mall and in director's offices in the City. The long arms of empire held its densely columned pages, foreign eyes of all shapes read its opinions. It was quoted in meetings of Cabinets and discussed in chancellories and drawing rooms from Moscow to Madrid and far beyond. There were no pictures in it, just words.

The times have changed beyond recognition and *The Times* along with them. Newspapers are different in our age of sound bites, spin doctors and pictures that move and speak everywhere we look. But the old 'Thunderer', as *The Times* of London was – mostly affectionately – known, remains important. It can tell us about where we were once, when its news and comment covered the things that mattered to the people who mattered, and it lectured and hectorated on the why and the why not, as well as the what, of the affairs of the world.

The life of Sir Valentine Chirol is inseparable from *The Times* although he spent only 20 of his 78 years on the payroll at Printing House Square, where it was produced. He was also, during that long and eventful life, a diplomat, an historian, a political theorist, a public speaker. But it was as a journalist that he made his name. During his two decades at *The Times*, most of which were spent running the foreign room, he made its pronouncements almost as closely watched as the statements coming out of the official Foreign Office. At the same time Chirol did more than determine the paper's foreign line. Along with the editor, George Buckle, and the managing editor, Moberly Bell, he protected its journalistic principles and, in his own determined way, helped make it what he was – a dedicated champion of the British Empire.

'My humble self' he would jokingly – or half-jokingly, since he took himself quite seriously – refer to himself to his closest friends. But this

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

was the man recommended to the then President, Teddy Roosevelt, as one of the most influential men in all of England and referred to by the Chancellor of Germany as one of the most dangerous enemies of the German Empire. Chirol produced 11 books, scores of articles and reviews, acres of newsprint, thousands of letters and kept a tight lid on self-revelation. He could sing as well as paint, was a formidable linguist and an intrepid traveller in an age when travel – especially to the places he went – was not undertaken lightly. For much of his adult life he was prone to debilitating illness and torturing anxiety. He cherished his friends, adored children and was devoted to his mother. Never married, he was never happier, except perhaps when travelling in some exotic locale, than secure in the bosom of family life, the bigger the family the better.

Chirol was an intensely private man in a very public job and at a supremely important and interesting time in history. He became the foreign editor of *The Times* at the tail end of the nineteenth century, the century of peace – relative – and progress – remarkable. All the horrors of our own century lay ahead, unknown to him then, although he not only lived to see them begin but had his own share of steering to do as the ships of state sailed toward the edge of their world of beckoning promise.

For many reasons, Chirol is a fascinating man. He was representative of his time, place and class, if anything so idiosyncratic as a human being can be truly representative of anything other than him- or herself. He recorded the world around him with unflagging interest, making a life out of what, in his own words, was the constantly unfolding chronicle of history as it happened. The chronicle of his personal story, set into that teeming canvas, is what follows.

I The Wages of Faith

In some dusty register or hushed archive there might be a record of Mary Valentine Ignatius Chirol's birth, or, perhaps, his baptism, but no amount of searching has unearthed either. The only reasonable certainty is that, whatever records there might be, they are not to be found in England but somewhere in Europe, a large haystack for a small needle.

Wherever he was born, it happened on 23 May 1852. Britannia ruled both the waves and a large part of the world as well. The previous year a glittering Crystal Palace in Hyde Park had shown all comers what industriousness, enterprise and a powerful navy could make of a small island country. London was justly proud of its exhibition, the British of their still growing empire, and all of his life Valentine Chirol was a real British bulldog. Although neither born, raised or educated there, he spent the best part of his life serving, in his conscientious and sometimes combative fashion, both England and her empire.

The new baby swelled the Chirol family to a total of five. That was as big as it ever got, nor was it that big for very long. Death, not divorce, was usually what broke up families in those days and more often than not it removed mothers. In Chirol's case it was religion that, as he put it, 'ruined' his father and then, by removing him entirely, 'destroyed' the small family.¹

Alexander Chirol, born in London in 1816, was the son and grandson of refugee Huguenot pastors. Educated at Shrewsbury and Clare College, Cambridge, young Alexander, unsurprisingly, took up the family calling. But, born and educated as an Englishman, he took it up as an Anglican.

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

In 1845, four years after his ordination, he married Harriet Ashburnham, a well-bred girl of solidly Anglican and ancient English lineage. Her father was, like her new husband, a Cambridge and a Clare man. He had been Rector of Catfield and Vicar of Ditchling in East Sussex; an older brother, the Reverend Sir John Ashburnham, Bart, had served as chancellor of the cathedral and Prebendary of Chichester, Rector of Guestling and Vicar of Pevensy. Between the Huguenot Chirols – Alexander's father, Jean Louis, had had an illustrious career of his own in the French Church in London – and the Anglican Ashburnhams the young couple might well have thought that they had God on their side. God behaved inscrutably, as always.

The Anglican Church in the middle of the nineteenth century was a Church in crisis. What began, in the 1830s, as an attempt at spiritual renewal and reform ended in painful divisiveness and the wholesale hurling of anathema. These were the years of the Oxford Movement, founded and led by men full of doctrinal passion and passionate determination. The ideas of the reformers were initially supported from within the Church. But, by the early 1840s it seemed to many early supporters that the cleansing broom was sweeping rather too vigorously. In 1843 John Henry Newman, late of Oxford and one of the most brilliant wielders of that broom, shocked his contemporaries by saying that there was nothing in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the doctrinal foundation stone of the Anglican Church, that really conflicted with Roman Catholicism. With this pronouncement he stepped over a personal spiritual Rubicon. Two years later he stepped out of the Anglican Church entirely to go over to Rome.

Newman's conversion was a momentous event. It produced, besides a classic of confessional literature, a great many flustered and frightened Anglican divines who made haste to indite and condemn. And, far down the ecclesiastical ladder, it heightened an ongoing crisis in the soul of Alexander Chirol, then a new curate at St Paul's, Knightsbridge. By comparison with Newman's well-documented struggle and defection, Alexander Chirol's battle with doubt was a brief footnote. But, by following Newman into the Roman Church, he did generate some heat and some public print as well.

St Paul's was a recent foundation when Alexander Chirol joined its clerical family in the spring of 1847. The vicar, the Reverend William Bennett, was himself partial to some of the ideas of the reformers, although in his case he was drawn more to visual embellishments than to doctrinal change and contented himself with the introduction of

candles and incense and the wearing of vestments. His new curate, however, wrestled with more substantial matters. He wrote to Bennett that he stood at a painful crossroad, wept when asked to partake of communion, and was clearly, said a senior curate, 'in great pain of mind'. That pain finally got the best of him and in the summer of 1847 he resigned his curacy without, according to Bennett, giving one word of explanation or making 'any attempt at finding the truth'. That was bad; worse was to follow.

When Alexander Chirol – along with his wife, baby son and widowed mother – went over to Rome, Bennett fairly exploded. Mindful of criticisms levelled at his own head because of his Oxford leanings, he gave his former curate no quarter. From the pulpit of St Paul's he accused the wretched Chirol of 'losing sight of everything true, honourable and just: and of an act of apostasy... glaring... indecent, and... fearfully treacherous in the eyes both of God and man'. To nail down his own reputation as a reliable defender of the English Church, Bennett nailed a notice to the door of St Paul's, which said in no uncertain terms that Alexander was 'DEPRIVED for the present of all the spiritual functions of HOLY ORDERS and EXCOMMUNICATED from the Church of England' and warned his congregation 'against holding any intercourse, by letter, speech or otherwise, in spiritual matters with the said Mr Alexander Chirol' on pain of their own salvation.²

Bennett's dire words led the tormented Chirol to produce a small apologia of his own, a pamphlet called 'A Statement of Facts'. Bennett countered with 'A Reply to "A Statement of Facts"'. At that point Alexander's new sponsors, in the person of the Right Reverend Nathan Wiseman, a leading Catholic clergyman in London and soon to be a new English cardinal, entered the lists. His contribution to the little pamphlet war was called 'Conversion: A Letter to Mr Alexander Chirol & his family, on their happy admission to the Communion of The Holy Catholic Church and on some Publications to which it has given Rise'. He wrote it, said Wiseman, because, where other, even deeply respected, Anglicans were allowed to depart the Church 'almost in silence', Alexander Chirol had been 'pursued by a volley of scornful and intemperate speech, not merely shot forth in hasty anger, but persevered in through repeated editions, postscripts, notices and replies, as though he had been chosen out for the party of one who will hunt down his fame, unrelenting, to the earth'.³ Why that was so Wiseman did not say, nor has anyone else. But his 'Letter' to the new converts seemed to do the trick as far as publicity was concerned

and the matter, along with the little Chirol family, disappeared from public view.

Joining the Roman Church meant more than a religious relocation for the Chirols. The future Cardinal Wiseman enjoyed considerable influence at Rome, and perhaps it was he who arranged for Alexander Chirol to do something at the Vatican. What that was or how long it lasted is unknown, but in time it led his younger son to confess to having 'a profound distrust of all R.C. ecclesiastics, based... upon family experiences and my father's relations with the Vatican, which were at one time of a very confidential nature'.⁴

Where the Chirols lived after 1847 is as impossible to discover as Valentine's birthplace or the nature of his father's work while in Rome. What is known is that when Valentine was still a young child his father was revisited by doctrinal doubts. This time there were no witnesses to report on his sufferings, but they were enough to send him back to the Anglican Church, back even to the Reverend Bennett – now in a different Church and apparently a forgiving frame of mind – and back to England, taking his elder son, Thomas Alexander Ashburnham Chirol, to be raised as an Englishman and in due course to be ordained in the Anglican Church. In later years Valentine and his mother were in touch with Thomas, but there is not the slightest shred of evidence to say that either ever saw Alexander Chirol again.

Harriet Chirol, with centuries of Anglicanism behind her, made a far better Roman convert than her emotionally wobbly husband. And it was her pious, charitable and broad-minded tolerance that kept her younger son, who himself never had more than a limited tolerance for the faith that gave his beloved mother such 'unfailing spiritual comfort', a nominal Catholic until her death. The two of them, and Alexander's mother as well, stayed on alone in Europe. Where the little group lived or what they lived on is another mystery, although, ironically enough, Louisa Chirol did have a yearly pension paid to her in recognition of the great services rendered the French Protestant Church by her late husband.

Valentine Chirol did not have a happy childhood even though he had the undivided attention of his adored and adoring mother. He was small for his age, his health delicate. Precocious and imaginative, he spent hours alone with books, many of them religious, filled with pictures of far-away places with strange-sounding names. He remembered later being particularly taken with the land of Uz, home of Job. It was less the odd name of the place, or even Job's amazing supply of patience, that fascinated him, rather his astonishing command of a multitude of

tongues. He himself grew up to be fluently trilingual, speaking, and dreaming, in French and German as easily as the English he and his mother spoke at home. To these he later added others, including Arabic and colloquial Turkish. One friend claimed that by the time he died Chirol was comfortable in as many as 15 languages. It might not have put him on a par with Job – nor was he particularly patient – but it was impressive, and, more to the point, utterly useful.

By the time that Valentine was ready for serious schooling he and his mother were living in Versailles, where he went to the local *lycée*. In 1869 he went into Paris to take his examinations for the Baccalaureates-Lettres at the Sorbonne. It would be his sole degree. During his *viva voce* he was suddenly overcome by the desire to let his examiners know that they were questioning an ardent Englishman.

When asked by these elderly Frenchmen to discuss the great Napoleon's Hundred Days, he saw his chance. After describing, in his fluent French, the return from Elba and the Battle of Waterloo, he ended his hitherto dispassionate account in words worthy of *la rhétorique* of the top form in a *lycée*. 'The glorious tenacity of our troops triumphed in the end,' he declaimed to a line of astonished French faces, and 'our victory was complete and decisive'. For a moment he feared that his runaway pride might cost him dearly, but, even at 17, was already enough of a diplomat to win the old professors over by claiming that his devotion to his *seconde patrie* was also deep and true.⁵

That second homeland was then feeling the effects of the unsteady governance of the lesser Napoleon. How much Chirol cared about French politics is not clear. He was 17, had a respectable French degree and had to consider his own future path. Where that path led was to Germany, where in the summer of 1869 he found lodging with an enthusiastically Anglophile schoolmaster in a small town near Frankfurt-am-Main. On special occasions his host would invite him to join the small circle of village notables at their weekly *Stammtisch*, where he picked up the local dialect far more quickly than a taste for the local beer.

In 1869 Frankfurt was the capital of the newly formed Prussian province of Hesse-Nassau, a change occasioned by a Prussian victory over Austria just three years earlier. It was a dramatic change in status as Frankfurt had long been a free city, first of the Holy Roman Empire and then of the German Confederation. Only 20-odd years had passed since the heady days when delegates to a National Assembly met in its cathedral, wanting to create a liberal German nation, a dream abruptly extinguished by the reactionary and powerful King of Prussia.

Chirol soon discovered that his Anglophile host, and many of his friends, had a pronounced anti-Prussian bias. Some of that seeped into his own consciousness, along with the local idiom. He was also struck by the fact that in this small community, with only one church building, the Catholic priest and Lutheran pastor peacefully shared it, holding consecutive services undisturbed by their denominational differences. It was a lesson in diplomacy and mutual concession that he never forgot.

In the summer of 1870, with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, the cosy camaraderie of the *Stammtisch* and some of the lessons in German language and life came to an end. But in the following weeks and months young Chirol would have the opportunity to see Prussian militarism at first hand rather than through the eyes of his jolly German friends. Again, the lesson would not be lost on him.

The war must have come as something of a shock to political leaders in Paris and London. In early July Lord Granville, the British Foreign Secretary, remarked that 'never during his long experience [had he] known so great a lull in foreign affairs', and the French Prime Minister, Emile Ollivier, stood up to tell the Legislative Council that 'in whatever direction one looks, one sees no irritating question arising: at no time in history has the maintenance of peace in Europe been more certain'.⁶ Military men on both sides of the Rhine knew better and had been worrying over plans for a conflict for some time. What was lacking was an irresistible provocation. As luck would have it a useful crisis more or less popped up by mid-summer. It all had to do with filling an empty throne in Madrid but, when the dust settled, the throne in Paris was empty and there was an entirely new one in Berlin.

On 19 July France declared war, unwisely as it turned out, on a well-prepared Prussia. Fighting got under way without delay, and for all intents and purposes was just as quickly over. By the beginning of September, although their army was badly mauled and Napoleon III a prisoner of war, the French, now self-proclaimed republicans, gave strong signs that they intended to fight on under a hastily constructed government of national defence. The Prussian response was to press on rapidly toward Paris. When they reached Versailles they stopped, set up headquarters, and waited for the besieged capital to starve or surrender.

In the long term the Franco-Prussian War had a dangerously bitter effect on Franco-German relations. In the short term it had a pronounced effect on Valentine and his mother. With Prussian troops pouring into France, the former said a hasty goodbye to his German friends to hurry back to Versailles. By mid-September some of those Prussian troops were

making themselves at home there, including in Harriet Chirol's house, conveniently located near the prefecture where old King William of Prussia had his command post. Everything had moved quickly in this war. The Chirols did as well, setting out for the Channel carrying only what they most needed.

Throughout that autumn and early winter of 1870 the Prussians waited and watched as Paris seethed with incipient rebellion and what remained of a French government tried to organise the provinces to continue fighting. Resistance proved fruitless. In January, with a week's worth of food remaining, Paris capitulated and signed an armistice. With the danger of actual fighting apparently over, Chirol went back to Versailles to see what had become of their house and furniture, to pack up what he could and arrange for it to be sent to Brighton, where his mother – not far from her childhood home – had settled down to stay. While on his mundane mission he had his most intense lesson yet, this time in revolutionary politics. It stayed with him for ever, even shaped the course his life would take for the next 50 plus years.

The young man's task was a practical one but local conditions made it both dramatic and dangerous. Having sighted his first *Pickelhaube* at Amiens, Chirol reached Paris on 1 March 1871, just in time to see their wearers march, rank upon forbidding rank, into the city. On and on they tramped, 'under the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde... [camping finally] in the Champs d'Élysées as on a field of battle in the grimly silent solitude with which the vanquished capital encompassed them'. His young, and always quite passionate, heart went out to the defeated country – and to the prostrate city – where he had spent his boyhood. But what he witnessed next, on the part of some of the 'vanquished' Parisians, left a far more negative impression on his young mind than even a grimly purposeful Prussian army had done.⁷

Thanks to his good German, Chirol, staying in Versailles, slipped easily through the sentry posts and in and out of Paris. He happened to be there on 18 March, inquiring about train connections to London, when the long-suffering city finally erupted. Propelled at first by his own curiosity and very soon, and more helplessly, by a murderous mob, he heard the shots that killed two generals loyal to the provisional government and the screams of '*La justice du peuple est faite! A l'Hôtel du Ville!*'. More than once in all the confusion he was in real danger and roughly handled, but managed, by answering back to the overwrought 'patriots' in their own slang, to pass himself off as a true *gamin de Paris*. On occasion he was frightened, as he should have been, but he never

considered missing the action. 'The impulsiveness of youth,' he wrote in the sedate retirement of old age, 'does not stop to count the risk.' Nor did he ever doubt that the risk he took to see the bloody birth of the Paris Commune was worth it.

The course of the Franco-Prussian War and the siege of Paris, which served as its last act, left young Chirol with a grudging respect for the efficiency and discipline of the Prussian troops. His fury and scorn were reserved for the Communards. He loathed the way those 'grotesquely insignificant madmen' aped 'the language and the methods of the great French Revolution'. Although his romantic notions about the 'great' revolution might not have withstood a taste of the actual event, he believed that it had, at the very least, some frightful grandeur of purpose. Bloodthirsty as it had been, its leaders knew how to organise victory against a world in arms. Their imitators, fighting against their fellow Frenchmen even as they coquetted with the Prussians still encamped on the other side of the city, were no patriots to a young man who particularly valued those who loved and defended their country.

As the Commune struggled, in its deadly fashion, to stay alive, Chirol's trips into Paris became increasingly problematic. One of his last visits was on 16 May. It was another day of violence and one on which he crossed paths with a man who would be as influential as a father to him in later years. He heard Laurence Oliphant before he actually saw him. The two of them were caught up in a seething Place Vendôme along with rowdies and rabble-rousers of all descriptions. When the milling mob toppled the great column that stood in the centre of the square, Chirol also heard, as much as saw, its impact. He next heard, as he wormed his way forward to get a better look at the 'Communist pigmies' swarming onto the broken pedestal to fling bombastic insults on the smashed figure of the great Napoleon that had topped it, someone say: 'Surely you're an English boy.' Startled, he glanced up to see a tall, bearded man, who continued, rather gruffly, to say that the Place was 'no place for a young monkey like you, and the sooner you get out of it, the better'. Accustomed as he was to talking back to Parisians in their own slang and to the German sentries in theirs, Chirol spoke not at all to the Englishman but simply shuffled off 'like a naughty schoolboy caught out of bounds'.⁸ He had no idea who the fellow might be, nor that they would meet again, again by accident, far from Paris and many years after the tumult in the Place Vendôme. The friendship that would then grow up between the two of them would be of the utmost importance to the 'young monkey' so obediently doing what he was told in the spring of 1871.

THE WAGES OF FAITH

Laurence Oliphant, a man of many talents and contradictory inclinations – novelist, journalist, man of the world and religious ascetic – was in Paris for *The Times* that unsettled spring. Unlike Chirol, Oliphant had a premonition that the two of them would cross paths in the future. He tried to find out just who the young red-headed boy might be, but to no avail. In the meantime the object of his enquiries had his hands full getting himself out of Paris. He was stopped by some suspicious Communards but managed to talk his way out of being locked up, then tramped halfway around the convulsed city, to reach the relative safety of Versailles. In spite of this close shave, in spite of Oliphant's stern warning, in spite of knowing that his mother depended on his return, he could not resist making one last visit to the inflamed – figuratively and literally – city.

As French republican troops battled their way in on 21 May, the red-headed boy slipped in behind them. When the radicals chose to destroy what they could not hold he watched, transfixed, from the terrace of St Germaine as a long line of fire crawled across the centre of town. When the Pavilion de l'Horloge of the Tuileries finally caught fire he saw a huge column of flame shoot up as if 'flaunting the red flag of the dying Commune over the whole sky'. This remarkable vision of hatred and



Dismantled statue of Napoleon in the Place Vendôme, Paris, 1871 © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/ Corbis.

wanton destruction also burned itself into his mind, leaving him forever wary of the formidable implications of unbridled radicalism and deeply sceptical about the political behaviour of the masses.

It was then, as he watched his *seconde patrie* succumb to violent change, that he made a vow to himself that he would devote his life to studying and writing history as it was being made, 'whether shaped by new aspirations or by ancient forces that have been slowly evolved through the centuries'.⁹ It was a mission that fitted neatly with the mood of the epoch. Change was on many men's minds – and in their eyes and ears – as the nineteenth century rolled down toward its close. But Chirol left an important thing unsaid when he later described himself as making this inward pledge. How was he to earn a living while charting history in the making? Whatever means he chose, he was going to do it in England. It was time to go home to its green and pleasant landscapes and more reliably bridled populace. It was time for him to be an Englishman in England.

By the end of May, the remaining family goods packed and due to be shipped, Chirol said goodbye to his friends in Versailles, to a Paris still smouldering, and to France. Setting off for the Channel, he was far from alone. More than a few Frenchmen – among them the former Emperor and also a sampling of the 'squalid Communard ruck' – were glad to trade the turmoil following on defeat for the sanctuary of England. It is ironic that some of those 'Communard pigmies' soon relocated in the vicinity of Soho Square, London, where 50 years earlier his emigrant French grandfather had preached and prospered. Although some of the former firebrands tried to keep their radical ideas alive, the only lasting revolution they brought to London turned out to be culinary.

In 1871 Chirol's *premier patrie* was also in the midst of a political transformation much quieter, but in its way as profound, as the changes affecting France. Crowds in London, when dissatisfied with the pace, or the nature, of the change, contented themselves with holding rallies or pulling down railings. They did not shoot generals, politicians or clerics, nor put the torch to Whitehall or Westminster. The Reform Bill of 1867, which marked the advent of real democracy¹⁰ in Britain, had passed through Parliament without the excuse of a lost war but its potential political effect was as great as the change from empire to republic across the Channel. Reaction at the time veered from rhetorical overload to political apathy. Politicians and publicists were full of dire warnings. Carlyle called it 'shooting Niagara' and Lord Derby 'a leap in the dark'. In the Commons Robert Lowe¹¹ warned that the country was about 'to enter upon a new era, when the bag which holds the winds will be

untied, and we shall be surrounded by a perpetual whirl of change, alteration, innovation, and revolution'.

In spite of the grim predictions, the masses proved less terrifying spectre than timid spook. Instead of being dead set on changing all the rules in their own favour, the legions of new voters seemed 'more respectful of institutions and persons, more imbued with the dull traditional habits of mind... [than wanting to] take advantage either of the possibilities of change and violence in the new era, or of the new role available to [them]'.¹² The only revolution that took place was a routine turning of the political wheel in 1868. Disraeli and the Conservatives, having seen the dreaded franchise reform through Parliament, were defeated on Irish Church disestablishment and made way in an orderly fashion for Gladstone and the Liberals. But, orderly as the change-over proved, the social and political reforms pushed through by the new government, while not as overtly dramatic as the great Reform Bill just passed into law, were profound in both the short and the long run. Not only did they bring concrete changes, they brought an almost tangible atmosphere of change, and especially of opportunity, now that 'men of parts and industry' were finally free to compete for civil service places, for commissions in the army, for the right to study at the great universities and where voters might make their choice free of fear of intimidation.¹³ This, then, was the England where Valentine Chirol would now live, for good, if not always very consistently. The year 1871 was for him, as for his country, a year of endings and beginnings.

How Chirol felt about leaving France and finally coming 'home' we will never know. He never said, in anything that survived him, if he was happy or anxious or excited, nor anything about the look of places or people, about differences, similarities, disappointments or satisfactions. After moving with him through the streets and squares of a defeated and then revolutionary Paris, watching murder and mayhem through his eyes, it is as if he vanished into thin air rather than into the yellow fogs of Dickensian London or the stolid bourgeois comforts of Brighton. His willingness – readiness, actually – to describe far-flung adventures or to analyse politics and personalities in brilliant detail stopped short of many details of his private thoughts and much of his day-to-day life. Only to his closest friends and generally in moments of great stress was he ever unguarded, at least in writing.

Properly speaking, London was no longer Dickensian in 1871, the eponymous author having died the previous year. Not only was Dickens dead and gone, the city he described so lovingly was fast changing. The

smoke was still there, the murky dens of the East End, the narrow, thronging streets around courts and counting houses. But ‘the conversion of the vast and shapeless city ... fog-bound and fever-haunted, brooding over its dark mysterious river – into the imperial capital’ was under way.¹⁴ In 1871 the great round form of the Albert Hall popped up in sedate Kensington; the new Embankment, wide and tree-lined, swept along the Thames from Westminster Bridge past Whitehall toward Blackfriars and the massive silhouette of St Paul’s dome; and in the Strand, Temple Bar, straddling the busy street since the reign of Charles II, was about to be pulled down to ease the ever-increasing congestion. London was now an imperial city, a world city; the old predominance of Paris broken for good.¹⁵

Valentine Chirol was now past his nineteenth birthday, well educated, if not in the English fashion, and trilingual, something most young Englishmen were not at his age. What was he to do next? Family finances were never mentioned and what he and his mother lived on is a mystery. It was all well and good to have dedicated himself during the exciting days of the Paris Commune to studying and charting history as it happened, but he also had to eat, and, if he wanted to see history unfold with any impact worth recording, he had to be somewhere besides Brighton.

London was, of course, the answer. Centre of government, of finance, transportation, commerce, culture, London was the heart not only of Great Britain but of the largest empire the world had ever known. Warehouse, counting house, sales house to the world, it was the empire’s largest city and constantly growing, swallowing up nearby settlements and reaching out along the lines of road and rail until towns such as Brighton were almost suburbs themselves. In 1872 Valentine Chirol helped to swell an already swollen population. If he knew anyone in London, if he had introductions, where he found rooms, what his hopes or plans were, all go without mention. What could he do, to whom could he turn for advice or help? On the Chirol side of the family there is no sign of contact – not even with his brother Thomas, recently out of Oxford and pursuing a career as a schoolmaster. On the other hand there were a number of Ashburnhams who might well have helped him. His uncle, Sir Anchitel Ashburnham, 8th Bart., co-heir of the ancient barony of Grandison, was a Justice of the Peace in Sussex and the head of a large family. More distant Ashburnham relations, descendants of the Earls of Ashburnham, had served in Parliament, at court and, in one instance, in the diplomatic service.

Chirol says nothing in his memoirs about family connections but someone obviously pulled a string or two, otherwise he would not have found a slot, however lowly, at the Foreign Office. Not that other

credentials were lacking; his familiarity with Europe, linguistic skills, passionate interest in contemporary history, all made him a strong candidate. But actually getting into that most exclusive of departments was neither straightforward nor routine, no matter that it had been recently visited, like so many other aspects of political and institutional life, by the spirit of Gladstonian reformism.

The pre-reform civil service was filled with men who had been recommended by peers, by MPs, by men with weight in the counties and constituencies. Not tested in any meaningful way, the reputation of Foreign Office clerks at mid-century was not for industry or efficiency. 'Since the privileged families were specially anxious to provide maintenance at the public expense for those of their members who were least likely to make their own way in life', it was more a case of 'heavy swells with long whiskers' lounging in late and leaving early; what able people there were on hand to direct them in their work had been brought in from outside.¹⁶ It was not until 1871, after both Treasury and civil service commissioners applied more pressure, that something resembling a real test of ability began to be used. But even those efforts did not finish off the time-honoured nomination system and may even have been designed specifically to forestall criticism of a method depended upon to preserve the aristocratic character and clannish structure of the place.¹⁷ Any young man who wanted to take the examination still had to have approval from the Foreign Secretary to do so. And still the weight carried by the position and interests of the parents or sponsors was at least as important as the qualities of the candidates themselves. Apparently Chirol's sponsors, whoever they were, were sufficiently weighty and his performance on the new examination impressive enough.

It is a very simple entry in the Foreign Office List – Chirol, Mary V.I., 3rd level clerk, 30 April 1872 – but it meant that, at long last, he 'officially' existed. He had been born, baptised and educated, but official mention of these events is missing. Faced with this blank – aside from the few stories he chose to put in his memoirs and the sparse hints sprinkled through his correspondence – one wishes that the Foreign Office had put down a few more details. But all it says, besides the bare essentials (already noted), is that he was placed in the department whose business was correspondence with Her Majesty's ministers and consuls abroad, with the representatives of foreign Powers in England, the Board of Trade and other departments of Her Majesty's government. All he had to do was serve loyally, be pleasant and, above all, patient, and he might rise to a position of real importance. Clear handwriting counted at least as much as, one hopes not more than,

drive or initiative. Exciting things were going on in the outside world but well-mannered security, not excitement, was on offer in Whitehall.

Chirol, Mary V.I., appeared again on the Foreign Office List of 1873. By 1874 he had inched his way up a notch to the second level. But in 1877 there was no Chirol; he had resigned in the spring of 1876, ending a career lasting only three years and 11 months. His reason for leaving these prestigious, if rather boring, precincts Chirol gave in just one sentence. Mentioning his stint in the Foreign Office in his memoirs he wrote that instead of saying that he spent four years there he ought to 'penitently admit' to having 'misspent them'. Leo Amery, a friend and colleague in later years, claimed in his memoirs that Chirol 'had begun life in the Foreign Office but had wrecked his finances in youthful exuberance...'.¹⁸ Perhaps that is what the ambiguous 'misspent' means, but, if it does, it seems strange that he continued to live without any visible means of support for another four years. It is more likely that he was tempted by the fact that, as compared with the pace in the office, things were happening in the outside world at an enviably quick tempo.

Later there were signs that he might have regretted leaving Whitehall, but not very bitterly. Besides, he came away with two valuable advantages – first some dear, lifelong and well-placed friends and second some useful training in the ways of diplomacy and the aims, and constraints, of British foreign policy. It was also the case that those brief years of training meant that for the rest of his life he thought of himself as a diplomat, tended to behave as one and enjoyed being treated as such. He never did mention having been introduced to 'the East' during those years. But, according to the anonymous author of his obituary in the journal *The Near East and India*, it was once being part of a mission to the Balkans that 'began his association with the East which was to remain his major interest for the rest of his life'.

Perhaps it was this unnamed mission, perhaps the excitement caused by Disraeli's 1874 purchase of a controlling interest in the Suez Canal, the fascination of the expanding empire itself, or youthful boredom or indecision – some or all of which lured many an Englishman to far-away places. Whatever inspired him, he moved back to Brighton and for six months poured over an Arabic grammar book. When he knew a long list of words, but not how to pronounce them, it was time to go and hear the language spoken. For this young man to turn his back on a Foreign Office career did not signal a lack of interest in foreign affairs. To the contrary, he wanted to get to know the 'foreign' close-up, study foreign affairs on the spot, the more exotic the better.

2 A Worldly Education

‘Whoever wishes to know the life of the East and would visit Cairo for that purpose must indeed make haste,’ wrote Ali Pasha Mubarak. New districts, wrote the distraught Pasha, were popping up overnight, replacing the monumental tradition of the Mamelukes with the latest fashion in Italian neo-baroque, all yellow stucco and bulbous moulding.¹ And there was the prodigal Khedive, Ismail, who went about bragging that before he was done he would turn Egypt into a ‘corner of Europe projected into Africa’. Chirol disagreed with Mubarak and discounted Ismail. To be sure there was now a small ‘European’ quarter, an up-to-the-minute opera house, and several broad new boulevards, one of them leading to a new – and only – bridge over the Nile. But the rest of the city, according to the dazzled Chirol, had been barely touched either by modernity or the West, and still offered ‘a picture of its mingled glory and havoc’ to delight his most receptive eyes.²

Fresh from the predictable, stuffy routines of Whitehall he was almost bowled over by the disarray of Egypt. On the train from Alexandria to Cairo he caught his first glimpse of the pyramids, ‘solid and real’ and standing on the edge of an actual desert, not just on the oft-turned pages of his boyhood picture books. His real education, or educations, into the ways of the East started the minute he stepped into the pandemonium of the Cairo railway station. Carried away from the dusty din on the back of a small, white donkey, the fascinated young man soon found himself in the shadowed, medieval streets of the old Muski, one of which led to

the Hôtel du Nil, a small inn in the old Christian quarter. It was on his first night there, sitting in the fragrant stillness of the inn's little courtyard, where he was captivated, for once and for all, by the entrancing mystery all about him. As he sat, looking up through the palms at a clear, star-sprinkled sky, there sounded in his ear the 'weird modulation of the call to prayer, which goes forth five times a day from every mosque throughout all the Mohammedan lands of the earth. Further off and more faintly... the same cry re-echoed over the sleeping city and died away into the night.'³ He had heard the East 'a-calling'. It was a call he could not resist for the next 50 years and more.

Hassan, the little donkey's proud owner, soon became a fixture in Chirol's daily life. An enterprising boy, he knew Cairo inside out and was more than happy to share his knowledge. With Hassan at his heels – and Lane's *Modern Egyptians* in his hand to offset his young guide's sometimes overly inventive accounts of local history – Chirol explored the city, making leisurely pilgrimages to the countless mosques as well as the scattered tombs on the fringes of the desert. Together they watched the strange rites and customs of popular life. Thus he learned the geography, art and living history of Cairo. But Hassan also taught his *Inglisi* the local dialect,⁴ amused no end as his determined student wrestled with its wretched gutturals and aspirates.

Four years earlier, in 1872, Disraeli, out of office but hardly out of sight, gave a stirring speech at the Crystal Palace. The country's attention and energy, he said, had been focused on domestic issues long enough. It was time for Englishmen to turn their gaze outward; to look on their growing empire as 'proof of the commanding spirit of these islands'. Chirol hardly needed Dizzy's reminder, or much encouragement, to do as he suggested. Britain's triumphs across the globe stirred his pride as little else could. By the mid-1870s, when he set out on his explorations of the East, the British Empire, although larger than it had been at his birth a quarter of a century earlier, was not as big as it would become.

During the 1870s, particularly after Disraeli's return to power in 1874, British imperial concerns and European power politics became increasingly interwoven.⁵ The Prime Minister was concerned above all with questions of power and security, with protecting the routes to India and safe-guarding the great Indian Empire itself. The spirit of nationalism was alive and well in Europe, spurred by the addition of a united and powerful Germany and a united, if not particularly powerful, Italy to the Continental picture. The apparent success of the principle of nationality that so altered the map of Europe in the middle of the nineteenth

century echoed in Disraeli's triumphant paeans to the virtues of the British Empire. It, he made plain, was a creation for the British to be as proud of as the Germans and the Italians were of their emergent nations.⁶

During most of the nineteenth century one of the most persistent headaches of the European Powers was what to do with the vast, varied and helplessly corrupt Ottoman Empire. At the end of 1875 this ramshackle construction seemed about to implode. Bosnia and Herzegovina were up in arms, unrest was spreading inexorably throughout the rest of European Turkey, there was pervasive discontent, although not open revolt, in Syria and Palestine, and Egypt was sliding rapidly toward bankruptcy and political chaos. In Constantinople, the centre of the flimsy web, the Sultan's government was at war with itself and could do next to nothing.

It was only with Napoleon Bonaparte's earlier attempt to sit astride England's land connection to India that Egypt had begun to emerge from centuries of isolation. The British navy put a stop to Napoleon's dream. But from then on Egypt was not allowed, or able, to return to its previous inwardness and instead played an increasingly important part in the calculations of European statesmen and empire builders. In recent decades England had been paying far more attention to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles than to Egypt. But in the mid-1870s, prompted in large part by the flourishing success of the new Suez Canal, this relative neglect was transformed almost overnight into an intense and, as it would turn out, long-lived interest.

Chirol was a schoolboy in Paris when the canal was being built, the brainchild of a Frenchman and paid for, in the main, by French investors. In 1869, the world marvelled along with the French at the 'Thousand and One Nights' pageantry of its opening celebrations. Even Chirol – not forgetting his patriotic flourishes at his recent *viva* – thrilled at the pictures of the French imperial yacht carrying the Empress Eugénie, 'a modern Cleopatra', through the new waterway with 40 ships trailing like a giant train in her wake.⁷

Five years later, Chirol's *premier patrie* scored its own dramatic, if less photogenic, coup. No sooner was the canal open than it was clear not only that England would be its chief client, but that London's refusal to participate in its financing had cost her any say in its operation. At the end of 1875 Disraeli made good that mistake, thanks to the Khedive having reached the bare bottom of his purse.⁸ With nothing to spend, nowhere to borrow, his country teetering on the verge of total financial collapse, Ismail finally agreed to put his last remaining asset, his shares

in the canal, up for grabs. Disraeli saw the opportunity, ignored the hand-wringing of his Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby,⁹ brow-beat his reluctant Cabinet colleagues into giving him *carte blanche* to do as he saw fit, borrowed £4,000,000 from his friends the Rothschilds, and bought the shares on 23 November. Before 1 December they were in the vaults of the British Consulate in Cairo and Great Britain had a 44% share in the canal.

Disraeli's swift step caused a sensation. Popular at home – where Queen Victoria rejoiced because 'it was a blow at Bismarck' – it was also applauded abroad, except in France. Leopold of Belgium called it 'the greatest event of modern politics', and Bismarck, unaware of the blow Victoria had been so happy about, congratulated Disraeli for doing 'the right thing at the right moment'.¹⁰ The purchase did not save Ismail. But it did give Britain a most important – and more than financial – stake in Egypt. Many years later Chirol wrote that

if international financiers had been alone interested in the state of Egypt the Rake's Progress might have been allowed to proceed without let or hindrance. But Egypt bulked equally large in the field of international politics [and]...the Egyptian Question...entered upon a new phase with Disraeli's purchase... [While] a brilliant operation for the British Exchequer, it was primarily a political demonstration, intended to remind all and sundry that Egypt was within the sphere of the British Empire's most vital interests.¹¹

With the shares in the bank and three new English directors sitting on the Canal Company's board, a financial expert was dispatched from London to assess the state of Ismail's state. In March 1876 he published a report, which confirmed the sorry condition – of the Egyptian Exchequer and recommended outside financial supervision. For a brief moment the British government again hesitated, claiming reluctance to interfere in Egypt's domestic affairs, but Ismail himself pushed them into action by availing himself of 'the last device of the insolvent gambler' and suspending payment of his debts.¹² London's hesitation vanished. As financial rescue efforts were being set up, Chirol was setting himself up in Cairo.

It was Ahmet Effendi, *professeur licencié de langue Arabe*, who taught him the modern literary Arabic of educated Egyptians. Like Hassan, the proud, if down-at-the-heels, Effendi was a guide to life in Cairo, although of a different sort from that available to the donkey boy. With him Chirol went to the so-called 'modern' cafes, the haunts of 'the young *intelligentsia*...who were beginning to develop nationalist aspirations. They knew little and cared less about the past history of

Egypt, but claimed to be familiar with all the underground currents of the Egyptian Court and the intrigues of foreign Powers...'.¹³

Between Hassan and Ahmet, Chirol soon knew Arabic, high and low. He also knew to cross the threshold of a room right foot first, to eat with his right hand only and to praise Allah when either he or anyone else sneezed, small habits but important in a polite society, in fact 'scarcely less essential', according to him, than the language itself. As diverting and useful as his guide-teachers were, Chirol also kept in touch with his fellow Europeans. According to him there were relatively few of them in Cairo when he got there, but more arrived on every boat, some coming to help Ismail empty his pockets all the more quickly, some to try and stop the haemorrhage.

What power was left to Ismail, after the arrival of European commissioners and the setting up of financial controls, he used to make trouble. Compelled to cede his personal estates in return for a fixed Civil List, and to adopt the principle of ministerial responsibility, he cordially welcomed the Cabinet forced upon him, and began at once to intrigue against it. Given its government, or rather lack of, the country lurched from crisis to crisis, both political and financial. Finally the British and French governments induced the Sultan, still Ismail's nominal suzerain, to oust him in favour of his eldest son, Tewfik. This time Ismail did not struggle but 'bowed submissively to the inevitable, and retired with dignity' in June 1879.¹⁴ Off he went, first to Europe, to Naples, Paris and London, before settling for good in the more familiar atmosphere of Constantinople. Chirol had left Egypt six months earlier, headed in his own roundabout way for the same city.

During the months and years that the unsavoury Ismail spent all that he had, the Sultan's hands were full with more pressing business than his insolvent Khedive. By 1876 his European possessions¹⁵ were in open rebellion. The Serbs gave the rebels armed support, the Russians provided sympathy, but it was only when the Bulgarian Christians joined in that Constantinople responded in kind. The fighting, particularly on the part of the infamous Turkish irregulars, the Bashi-Bazouks, was savage.¹⁶

With the situation in the Balkans going from bad to worse, Britain, Russia and Austria, the Powers most concerned in the affairs of that troubled area, discussed remedies among themselves, trying on the one hand to pressure Constantinople into making reforms and on the other to position themselves so that, should the Balkan house of cards at last collapse, they would be poised to grab pieces for themselves. In the midst of all the confusion and cross-purposes, Constantinople was convulsed by

a palace revolt. The conspirators, vaguely nationalistic in aspiration, were led by a liberal-leaning, reformist minister by the name of Midhat Pasha. They deposed two Sultans in quick succession before deciding that Abdul Hamid II would be a suitable ruler with Midhat as his Grand Vizier. The new Sultan duly promised widespread reforms, but, like his predecessors, had little or no intention of actually doing much in his Balkan provinces.

By the end of 1876 the Russian government, pushed by an increasingly vocal pan-Slav movement and frustrated by lack of action, threatened war on the Ottomans. Representatives of the Powers met in Constantinople in a last-ditch effort to force the necessary reforms from the new Sultan. Their wily adversary was one step ahead of them. Proclaiming an up-to-the-minute 'liberal' constitution – written by Midhat – Abdul Hamid made the Powers' demands seem redundant, therefore dismissible. As it turned out the new constitution, and its author, were equally so. Midhat was soon enough sent off to Damascus to serve as governor of Syria. With him at a distance, Abdul Hamid closed down the new Parliament and forgot all about the constitution. Corruption and inefficiency effortlessly resumed their sway, nothing was done to remedy grievances in the Balkans or even to punish those guilty of the recent outrages. The Powers just as routinely talked of other remedies, which were equally ignored. Even Whitehall admitted that the Sultan's behaviour was a blatant provocation to Russia, and there was little surprise when war was declared in St Petersburg on 24 April 1877.

The fighting lasted less than a year, the bulk of it taking place in the already devastated Balkans. England remained officially neutral,¹⁷ although she took the precaution of warning Russia to stay away from Egypt and the canal. In January 1878, with Russian troops poised to take Constantinople, the Turks asked for an armistice. The Russians granted it, then hurriedly began work on a treaty that would get them what they had wanted for many years. The result, signed at San Stefano on 3 March and ratified by Russia two weeks later, also got them a chorus of protest from European capitals.

The primary sticking point was article VI, which set up a Bulgarian state, nominally autonomous but clearly not. This creation, stretching from the Black Sea to the Aegean and including lands both north and south of the Balkan mountains, as well as much of Macedonia, was to be occupied by Russia for two years.¹⁸ This was unacceptable as far as the other Powers were concerned. They made it clear that if the 'sick man of Europe' could not defend himself, others would do it for him. A wave

of Russophobia swept over England, the Cabinet went so far as to authorise the calling out of the reserves and moved some troops from India to posts in the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹ The Austrians were no less vociferous, and the small Balkan states chimed in with their own complaints. It was a notably tense spring as missions and missives shuffled back and forth across Europe.

By the time that Russia agreed to renegotiate her terms, much of the work had already been done in a series of confidential agreements between Austria, Russia and Britain. Nevertheless all of the Great Powers met in congress at Berlin in June 1878, with Bismarck playing the part of ringmaster. Claiming to be an 'honest broker' he made it clear that unless article VI was revised the congress would fail. It was, the rest of the business went quickly, and within a month the assembled dignitaries were on their way home. What they had devised in Berlin was far from perfect, but the product stuck together, more or less, until July 1914.

Although spared some of the worst of the terms imposed by St Petersburg, the Ottomans were under no illusion that the modification had anything to do with admiration for their system, nor was the shape of things in the Balkans returned to the *status quo ante* by any means. There the 'sick man', wholly at the mercy of the European doctors, had a major operation. When he awoke from the surgery he found that he had lost approximately half of his former lands in Europe and gained the responsibility of making wide-ranging reforms in what was left and in Asia Minor. As a pledge against the reforms England occupied Cyprus.

Chirol arrived in Beirut early in 1879, hard on the heels of this masterstroke of diplomacy-cum-strategy. By putting British troops on Cyprus, almost in sight of the Lebanese coast, Disraeli's 'magic wand' cast an even greater, though more evanescent, spell over Syria than his purchase of Ismail's Suez Canal shares had over Egypt. Rumours flew around the province that deliverance from the hated Turk was at hand. Although the rumour was false and the hope misplaced, what struck Chirol was how persistent, widespread and nearly mystical the belief was in England's ability to effect this freedom.

There is no record of Chirol's reaction to the work carried out in Germany until many years, and many wars, had come and gone. Then he judged it, with the benefit of hindsight, as pregnant with the germs of those wars, having 'carried the recognition of the principle of nationalities in the Balkan peninsula just far enough to whet the appetite of all its restless peoples, but not far enough to satisfy a single one'.²⁰ But, as he wandered through Syria, Asia Minor and the Balkans over the next few

years, he frequently bumped up against the more immediate effects of the decisions reached in Berlin.

He also bumped up against people able to help him in any number of ways. In his memoirs he says that he generally just 'fell in' with agreeable companions; but he also had more reliable help in the form of letters of introduction, from whom he never said. One such letter led him to J.G. Eldridge, the long-term British Consul-General in the Lebanon. For Chirol, who idolised him, Eldridge was little short of an 'uncrowned king', but one with the tact and wisdom not to behave as such.

It was thanks to Eldridge that Chirol got a first-hand lesson in the strength of British influence in that part of the world. Latent religious violence between the Muslim Druse population and their Maronite Christian neighbours seemed set to re-erupt. To forestall it, Eldridge sent Chirol as his emissary to Druse headquarters on Mount Hermon. With him went a brief, but pointed, message to their leader; the Druse were to stay quiet, give no provocation to their enemies, and the particular grievances that had caused the crisis would be redressed. For that they might trust to the 'word of an Englishman'. The leader, who to Chirol's surprise turned out to be an elderly woman, listened, then turned to ask the assembled chiefs if they had more faith in the Englishman's word than hatred and fear of the Turks. 'With one voice they bowed low...touching breast and lips and forehead: "Wallahi. We trust the Englishman's word, and having it need dread no Turk."' ²¹

The tension, which had been intense, faded almost as they spoke. That such an improvised peace mission, in such a place, needed as its only sanction the word of an Englishman affected Chirol strongly. From then on it was a matter of keen importance to him that statesmen, diplomats or politicians upheld the inviolability of an 'Englishman's word' – whether embodied in a treaty, agreement or simple declaration. For him no one who mattered could go back on his word without betraying the very essence of what it was to be an Englishman.

Chirol carried no letter of introduction to Laurence Oliphant, nor did he need one. The moment he saw the tall, stooped figure and flowing beard he remembered the scolding he had been given in the Place Vendôme nine years earlier. After a most extraordinarily varied career, Oliphant was in the Holy Land on a final, and typically idiosyncratic, mission designed to resettle European Jews in their ancient homeland.²² By the time he re-met Chirol he had found the land and was preparing to negotiate with Turkish officials about settlements. As a first step he was to go to Damascus to talk with Midhat Pasha, and he invited Chirol

to come along. It was the beginning of a very special friendship. Part saint, definitely worldly, Oliphant fascinated Chirol. Although the younger man found it difficult at times to understand him, it was impossible not to love him.²³

Chirol might well have been the son Oliphant never had, Oliphant the father that Chirol had hardly known. There were very real similarities in their backgrounds, their preferences and their characters. Passionate in their interests, restless and curious, both were drawn to foreign cultures and customs, and were intellectually and spiritually captivated by the 'East'. Both were only sons, born to English parents but not in England, both had strict religious training as children and strong ties to their mothers. As grown men both thrived on physical adventure, on writing and on an abiding interest in politics and international affairs. One of Oliphant's biographers described him in terms that could be used, without changing a word, to describe Valentine Chirol. Speaking about the Jewish settlement scheme, she wrote that the project had come as a godsend because it 'gave him the pleasure of a sort of amateur diplomatic negotiation involving the largest issues, and the mixture of adventure and use, which was at all times the thing he liked best in life'.²⁴

Much preferring 'byways' to 'highways', the two men wandered happily off toward Damascus, making their way through the steep mountains of Lebanon, lodging with the people of the countryside, Christian, Jew or Muslim. For Chirol an unforgettable spot was the ancient village of Malula, tucked almost inaccessibly into an arid fold along the eastern fringe of the mountains. Its inhabitants were Christian, but so cut off from the outside world that even those of middle age could not remember having seen foreigners. Chirol and Oliphant were therefore objects of great curiosity, as were the villagers to them. What struck the travellers most forcibly was the fact that, although many of the people seemed able to speak Arabic, what they actually spoke was Syriac and when the village children crowded too close or stared too hard so that their mothers scolded or sent them away 'we liked to remember that it was probably in their very tongue that Jesus had bidden the people of Galilee to let the little children come unto Him'.²⁵

After a night in Malula the travellers pressed on until, by the following afternoon, they found themselves on a cliff overlooking a most marvellous sight. Below and beyond was the city of Damascus, 'a shining expanse of flat white roofs broken by countless domes and minarets, and entirely encircled by a broad belt of gardens and green trees and orchards, the golden deserts of Arabia stretching far away beyond towards the

Euphrates'.²⁶ In the city they were warmly greeted; they also discovered that it would not be a quick visit, as Midhat had to get an agreement to Oliphant's scheme from the Porte. While waiting the two Englishmen were entertained with all sorts of local spectacles – some that few, if any, such 'infidels' had ever seen. From time to time Chirol was called upon to translate for Oliphant and thereby had his own opportunities of talking with Midhat. He found him personally impressive, but was appalled by the pervasively corrupt system he ran. At the same time he could not but see that, however badly the Turks mismanaged things, they still had considerable power at their disposal and would go to some lengths to keep it.

Eldridge and Oliphant were men of affairs and of connections and from both Chirol took a combination of moral example and practical advice. There was one other apparently 'accidental' encounter in Syria that had an altogether different, but no less great, impact on his subsequent life. This chance meeting was with Tristram Ellis, an artist whose watercolour studies of the Near East were a familiar feature every spring at the Royal Academy. Given the job of leading Ellis to various 'picturesque corners' discovered earlier with Oliphant, Chirol was at first content to sit and watch. One day he felt able to make a suggestion about the work in progress and soon enough ventured to offer some criticism. Ellis, either to encourage his new friend or to keep him quiet, suggested that since he seemed to have an eye for colour and composition he ought to take up painting himself. Without another word Chirol borrowed some supplies and then and there sat down to work. In the end he never became anything more than a competent, sometimes quite pleasing, watercolourist. But the enjoyment he got from his painting was immense, and he once said that he had much more fun with his paintbox than pleasure with his pen. But it was with the latter that he made his name, his living, and using it was where his real talent lay.

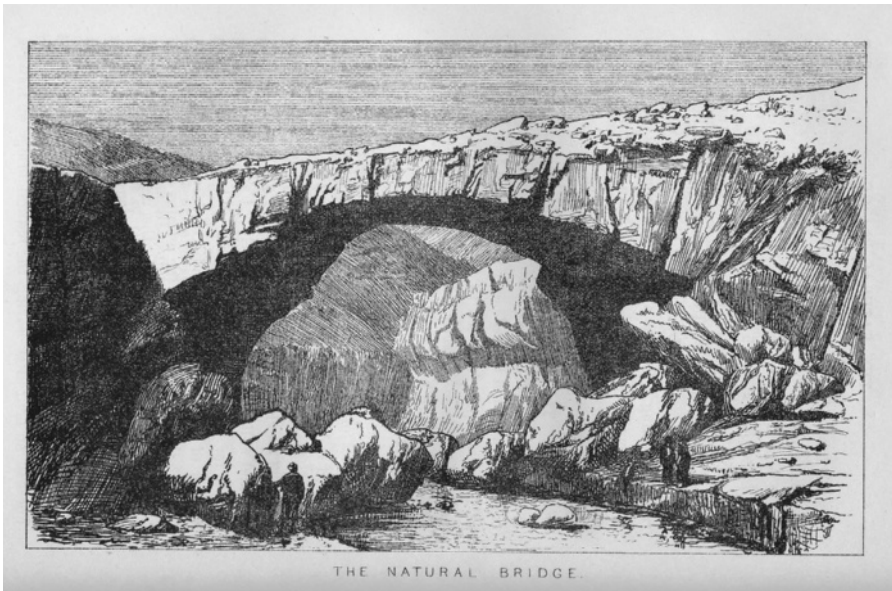
During 1879 and into 1880 Chirol travelled continuously in Syria and Lebanon, sometimes alone, sometimes with friends such as Ellis or T.S. Jago, the British Consul at Damascus. He slept in the shadow of the column where St Simeon Stylites had mortified his flesh, saw the grave of a Roman legionaire's wife in the desolate city of Palmyra, crossed the Jordan and rode through the Mountains of Moab, 'a No-Man's Land in which the writ of a rascally mongrel Beduin chief ran much further than the Sultan's, but could be bought for a trifling consideration'.²⁷

How he paid for these comings and goings Chirol never said. But after years of travel, and study, he might well have had a need, if not a

A WORLDLY EDUCATION

desire, to find something remunerative. Once again Oliphant had a part to play. After their trip to Damascus the two men separated, Oliphant going to Constantinople to petition the Sultan in person on behalf of his scheme, Chirol carrying on with his travels. Oliphant's business went slowly, when it went at all, but he talked with his many friends and kept a sharp eye on all and sundry, including on the new Sultan. Early in 1880, remembering that Chirol was planning to move on to Asia Minor and European Turkey when he had had his fill of Syria, he wrote to say that now was the moment to do so. To understand the condition of the Ottoman Empire and to gauge the future of Anglo-Ottoman relations, one must stand in the centre and look out rather than stand on the edge and look in.

Oliphant's own days in the Ottoman capital were, at the same time, drawing to a close. The Sultan would not commit himself to supporting the settlements, Oliphant himself felt that it was necessary to reorganise the campaign, and he missed his wife. But before leaving he wanted to introduce Chirol to some of his 'friends in high places', among whom was Edgar Whitaker, the proprietor of the *Levant Herald*, then the leading English-language newspaper in the Near East. At Oliphant's suggestion Whitaker offered Chirol a job, he duly accepted it, and as a result had, he later said, a brief, but very useful, apprenticeship in



'The Natural Bridge', Lebanon, Valentine Chirol.

journalism. At that point the die was cast, whether or not Chirol knew it.

By the time Oliphant left Constantinople Chirol was busy with his journalism and with getting to know the city on the Golden Horn, crossroads of East and West, 'cockpit' for the clashing interests of the Great Powers, and now a laboratory for Abdul Hamid's ambitious projects. But he could not confine himself to the city, fascinating as it undoubtedly was. Although his mentor had felt that he would learn more in the capital than in the provinces, the temptation to travel the 'byways' of Anatolia, as he had those of Syria, was overwhelming.

He went by horse, alone this time, except for a Turkish servant. Now and again a *zaptieh* – a Turkish policeman – rode with him, courtesy of local authorities far less interested in his safety than curious as to what he was doing. As he travelled he took note of the mood of the people and the state of the countryside. Travel was difficult, sometimes dangerous, but the rugged, far-stretched landscape, dotted with the ruins of civilisations long gone, and the opportunities of coming into close daily contact with all manners and conditions of people stimulated him no end. By and large the people were quite friendly, save the occasional official who disliked and suspected the 'prying eyes of a foreigner [who was] a *rara avis* in those days and seldom prone to pay them a visit unless he wanted something'.²⁸

The impression that he came away with was more of the customary Ottoman 'misery and misrule'. The failure to defeat the Russians had thrown up new problems to add to the effects of many decades of administrative chaos. Sedition was in the air and he heard one local official swear 'a great oath and declare that there could be no salvation for Turkey until the power of Constantinople was broken and a *Rimpublic* proclaimed'.²⁹ Unlike the mystic Oliphant, Chirol did not believe that he could look into the future. But the further he travelled, the more he saw, the more convinced he became that the old ways of running the ramshackle empire not only must change but were already changing. He could only speculate as to where the changes would lead, but, even then, realised that they were intended to be fundamental, not merely cosmetic.

The humiliation of military impotence spurred Abdul Hamid to look for other ways to make a mark in the world. Two 'new departures' struck Chirol as significant. The first was the Sultan's determination to revive, in his 'personal rule', the ancient splendour and power of the Caliphate.³⁰ Muslims had argued for years about the exact nature of the religious authority vested in this office. Many, if not most, of Abdul Hamid's

predecessors had paid scant heed to the title but not so he. 'Whatever it might mean for hair-splitting divines,' wrote Chirol, for the new Sultan 'the Caliphate meant the acknowledged headship of Islam, beyond as well as within his temporal dominions... all were to be taught to look once more for comfort and guidance to the Ottoman Empire'.³¹

To Chirol this signalled an intention to strengthen the bond of Muslims within the empire to the Sultan and to weaken that of Muslims outside his domains to the infidels who ruled over them. The power of this 'pan-Islamic' concept soon became – and long remained – a major concern and preoccupation for the empire-oriented Chirol.

Abdul Hamid's second 'new departure' was to ask the Germans for help in redesigning and rebuilding his recently shattered army. Very quickly a German foot was planted firmly in the Ottoman door. Chirol rightly suspected that at least part of Bismarck's motive was to maintain a 'brokerage' at Constantinople where he could oversee and manipulate the clashing interests of his two great neighbours, and putative partners, Russia and Austria. This arrangement was one thing under Bismarck, but when the 'brokerage' passed into hands other than his, as it did a decade later, Chirol was less sanguine about the arrangement.

As one part of the 'tinkering' with Ottoman real estate that had taken place in Berlin, Greece was promised a swath of Ottoman territory lying just across her border in Thessaly and the Epirus. The Greeks were impatient for the change, but the Powers, by giving the Turks a few years to prepare the local inhabitants for the transfer, in fact gave them time to display their talent for delay. By 1880 tempers along the disputed border were badly frayed. As well as tension in Thessaly and the Epirus, there was also serious friction, and some actual fighting, between newly independent Montenegro and Ottoman Albania over disputed territory along the Albanian coast. Again the Turks did little to resolve things one way or another, although, to be fair, even their Ottoman rulers and co-religionists found the Albanians extremely hard to push.

Faced with the sublime indifference of the Sublime Porte, London resorted to threat by naval demonstration. In September 1880, just as Chirol had made up his mind to go off and have a look at the lands at issue, an English fleet appeared off the coast of Albania. According to him, the showing of the mailed fist did little more than make 'the official world of Stamboul proportionately [more] exasperated against foreigners in general, and Englishmen in particular, who were held to be singly and collectively responsible for this peculiar outcome of Mr Gladstone's Turcophobia'.³² It also made it very difficult for Chirol to get permission

for his planned travels. No matter how long he 'ante-chambered' in the 'tumble-down buildings' where Ottoman bureaucrats had managed, or mismanaged, the affairs of state for centuries, no official passport was forthcoming. The civil servants could hardly know that Chirol was in the habit of consulting his 'own inclinations rather than my neighbour's', had no intention of deferring to the convenience of the Sublime Porte.³³ He forgot about an official visa, equipped himself in 'the lightest marching order', got some of his usual letters of introduction to local grandees, and set off on an Austrian steamer, bound for Volo. He put his trust in his own diplomacy and 'the chapter of accidents' to arrange things once he got on the other side of the Aegean.³⁴

As it turned out, the chapter of accidents worked very well. Over the course of the next month or two he travelled the breadth of the Balkan peninsula, from the foot of Mt Olympus through western Macedonia and into the Epirus; from Suli's Rock, high in the Albanian mountains, down to the shores of the Adriatic. He struggled with local dialects and the usual primitive and sometimes dangerous travelling conditions. But, as in Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, dangers and difficulties seemed more exhilarating than daunting to him.

The 'few letters of introduction' also served their purpose. In Larissa, the capital of Thessaly, he 'dined with the Greek Consul...with the Governor...with the Archbishop...with the Commander-in-chief [until] the gaieties...began to pall'.³⁵ As he moved on he noticed at once that people, common people as well as governors and archbishops, were as eager to talk to him as he was to have information from them. He also realised that he cut a mysterious figure, travelling about alone and asking questions, with no discernible motive beyond his own curiosity. Many took him – deny it though he did – for some sort of British official sent to get things ready for the handover of territory.³⁶ What he was, in fact, was a budding journalist. As an area of both actual and potential change this borderland was, to his mind, nothing if not newsworthy. At the end of the trip he had a head full of impressions, a notebook full of statistics, local opinion and various kinds of technical information ranging from topography to educational facilities. He also had a pad full of watercolour sketches.

In December 1880, William Blackwood, publisher of *Blackwood's Magazine*, got a short letter from his good friend and frequent contributor, Laurence Oliphant. In the pages of *Maga*, as those familiar with it called it, noted writers, imperial heroes and a wide assortment of adventurous travellers and explorers shared their experiences with others like

themselves, as well as with imperialists or adventurers more inclined to stay at home. Oliphant's letter, part business, part friendly chatter, mentioned that a friend of his by the name of Valentine Chirol 'has just returned from a most interesting cruise, through Thessaly, Epirus, Janina and the whole line of the Greek frontier. He says he can furnish two articles upon it and I am sure they will be well written and good.'³⁷ A week later came a letter from Chirol with manuscript enclosed, 'trusting you may find it of sufficient interest to warrant its publication in the next number of your Magazine'.³⁸

Blackwood was enthusiastic and wrote back to say that, although the material had come too late to make the January issue, he was putting it into type and would send off a proof to be returned in time for the following one. Chirol duly corrected the proof and returned it, but to London instead of Edinburgh, and so missed the February deadline as well. He had wanted it to be timely and was disappointed at the delay until he saw that the mounting crisis in that area might make his piece more rather than less up-to-the-minute. From what he was hearing, great changes were under way in south-eastern Europe, a new order of things evolving. He was convinced that the 'new wine of nationalism' was bound to have a powerful effect on the weak head of Turkey in Europe. Why not, he suggested to Blackwood, make a book out of all the notes he had taken 'as they would afford the most recent information respecting the country which would then be the seat of war & might thus derive from that fact an extrinsic value which their intrinsic merit could probably not claim'. It would be timely, also quite short, and he could illustrate it as well.³⁹

The idea of turning the rest of the material into a book gave Blackwood pause. By the end of February, having heard nothing from Edinburgh, Chirol wrote again to say that he was going to give up the idea and head back to Constantinople. His letter crossed one from Blackwood, apologising for his silence, and admitting that he had been 'rather puzzled' about just what to say. There were some books already out, which, although not so up-to-the-minute as his would be, might have 'filled the market'. At the same time he could see no harm in at least looking at the manuscript, as '[w]hether or not [it] had a commercial success perhaps it might be desirable with the view of bringing your name before the public, [and therefore] be of service to you hereafter in connection with any other literary undertaking...'.⁴⁰

Chirol's manuscript banished what was left of Blackwood's hesitations, and he wrote at once to say that it would make 'a capital little book'. Time was of the essence. 'If we can manage to bring [it] out quickly or before

the Greek question is closed or war breaks out I think it may be fairly successful but one never can tell what the public will rush for...'.⁴¹ Thus Chisol's carefully gathered impressions, opinions and information – and two of his favourite sketches⁴² – became *'Twixt Greek and Turk, or Jottings During a Journey through Thessaly, Macedonia, and Epirus in the Autumn of 1880*. He had made it clear to Blackwood and also to his readers that his main concern was to be impartial.

I have not written in order to plead either this cause or that one. I am not a Philo-Turk, nor am I a Phil-Hellenic, or a Philo-Wallach, or a Philo-Albanian, or a Philo-Bulgarian; but I believe that a great change is at hand in the south-eastern peninsula of Europe... The old Ottoman empire – the Musselman theocracy – is doomed, on this side of the Bosphorus at least. Whether its name and the shadow of its power be still allowed to endure... a new order of things is in process of evolution.⁴³

The author was in fact biased to a degree, although not toward any particular religion or nationality. The virtues of strong character earned his approval and he applauded individuals, or groups, who displayed courage, devotion, industry and political intelligence. Where he found fault was with both 'the incubus of Turkish misrule' and the over-centralised rigidity and fractious politics of the Greeks. By contrast he sang the praises of the stalwart Muslim fighters who, 'abandoned to their fate by the rulers of Constantinople',⁴⁴ held their mountain fastnesses during the Russo-Turkish War and the proud Albanian chieftains, working to reconcile their warring clans so that together they might achieve Albanian autonomy.

In the end there was no war between Greece and Turkey, a good thing in itself, but not so good for Chisol's little book. It had positive reviews and his hopes were high, but by the beginning of August he had to admit to Blackwood that it was 'a disappointment to me that the sale of my book does not go on as satisfactorily as you expected'.⁴⁵ In the meanwhile occasional assignments kept him busy, and in the Balkans. In April 1881 he covered a major earthquake on the island of Chios (Scio) for the *London Morning Standard*; in July he was in Bulgaria to report for the *Daily News* on changes already being made in a constitution barely a year old.

Russia's puppet state in Bulgaria had been drastically redesigned at the Congress of Berlin. Shorn of its Macedonian portion, the remainder was cut in half. The larger, northern section became the autonomous principality of Bulgaria, its southern neighbour, eastern Rumelia, had administrative autonomy and a Christian Governor-General but remained nominally subject to the political and military authority of the Sultan.

But, even as the Powers in Berlin redesigned Russia's planned satrap, they had tacitly recognised Russian predominance in the area. Thus the new constitution was written, if not to St Petersburg's dictation then certainly under its supervision, and the new ruler, Prince Alexander of Battenberg,⁴⁶ was handpicked by Tsar Alexander II. The young, handsome and inexperienced Prince accepted his new throne with the clear understanding that he would bow to the wishes of his Russian benefactors and protectors.⁴⁷

He did try to work loyally with his overseers, but faced with a national assembly dominated by liberals and nationalists, whose taste for independence was great and love of Russia small, found the going difficult when not impossible. Chirol's assignment in the summer of 1881 was to report on a *coup d'état*, complete with the virtual suspension of the new constitution. Unfortunately this change was one not initiated by the Bulgarian patriots in Sofia but by Alexander's Russian overseers in St Petersburg, who were determined to see 'the unfettered authority which [Alexander] was henceforth to exercise... exercised exactly as [they] might be pleased to direct'.⁴⁸ This arrangement soured rapidly and soon enough Chirol would be back in Bulgaria to witness even more dramatic changes. But at that point the real drama was taking place in Egypt, and by the end of the year Chirol was there as well, again on behalf of the *Morning Standard*.

He had been away for just under two years, during which time Egyptian politics had further deteriorated. On the one hand were the European financial experts and administrative managers, a group whose numbers, and visibility, had been rising as the need for their services increased. On the other was the decent, but fatally inert, Khedive Tewfik. Between the two was a flourishing nationalist movement, resentful likewise of the passivity of their nominal but powerless ruler and of the growing influence and power of the disliked foreigners. These nascent revolutionaries were led, in the main, by native Egyptians, chief among them a Colonel Arabi.⁴⁹

On 11 June, in 'a sudden outburst of fanaticism', a Mohammedan mob in Alexandria massacred half a hundred Europeans. The 'catastrophe towards which all parties had been blindly moving' had happened. But even now, faced with open rebellion, the Powers could not pull together. A French squadron, lying off Alexandria along with one sent by the British, was ordered away by a new government in Paris. Italy declined to take part in any action. The Sultan, as ever, prevaricated. 'Very reluctantly,' said Chirol, obviously proud that his countrymen had not shirked a difficult duty, 'the British Government undertook single-handed the task which none would share... and within two months Sir Garnet Wolseley

had scattered Arabi's vaunted army at Tel-el-Kebir and the British flag floated on the citadel of Cairo.⁵⁰ It would be there longer than anyone, himself included, could possibly have imagined.

Chirol was in Cairo as British soldiers marched into the city in mid-September. They would stay, said London, only until the country was restored to order and its government reorganised. As a step in that direction Anglo-French dual control was abolished – a slap at the do-nothing French – and Lord Dufferin, then British ambassador to the Porte, sent south in order to see what might be done to reconstruct, or, more to the point, construct, a workable government. In February 1883 he issued what Chirol later called the most 'adroit despatch in the annals of British diplomacy'.⁵¹ What it said was that Egypt, in effect if not in actual words, was now a British protectorate. In November of that same year a British general by the name of Hicks, in command of an Egyptian army in the Sudan, was killed by an army of religious fanatics led by a self-proclaimed Messiah, the Mahdi. From this moment on, British rule could no longer be thought of as temporary, no matter what London might pretend.

While General Hicks and his men were fighting for their lives in the Sudan, Chirol was back in Brighton with his mother. He wrote to Blackwood, wondering if he might be interested in two works 'of a somewhat more ambitious character'. By way of an answer he was told that the figures on *'Twixt Greek and Turk* were poor and, if the new works were about the Egyptian campaign, he, Blackwood, doubted if the public had much interest left. But he did not want to discourage Chirol from contributing other material to *Maga* and wondered where his wanderings might take him next.⁵²

They would, in fact, take him to Persia, but by a circuitous route. He first went to Haifa to visit with the Oliphants. Alice Oliphant, in a letter to her mother in London, drew a rather peculiar picture of their friend, but one interesting in the extreme as the only contemporary description of him as a young man. At the age of 31 Chirol was

an (almost) very nice fellow – very clever... & Laurence likes him very much. I rather want to stick a few pins into him, because he might be actively nicer, if he would take the trouble. He wants to see Guy [her brother], as he is going to Persia. He knows a dozen languages – has been in diplomacy, in 'Standard' correspondence as a 'special', wrote 'Betwixt Greek & Turk', & does various things & he & Guy will have much in common. We owe him nothing so you need not put yourself out in any way to entertain him – but if you can see him without giving

A WORLDLY EDUCATION

you any trouble I shall like him to see & know you – & he is a most untroublesome individual...⁵³

The untroublesome Chirol was indeed on his way to Persia, but via Ceylon and India, trekking the subcontinent from bottom to top before sailing down the Indus to Karachi, where he caught a ship bound for the Gulf coast of Persia. His customary curiosity, as much as pride in Britain's imperial mission, drew Chirol to India, but his visit did much to reinforce the latter. For the past seven years he had been immersing himself in the Mohammedan East and he felt ready to investigate the 'peculiar mystery of Hindu life'. He was as aware as the next man of the efforts – administrative, military and financial – that had gone into Britain's Indian experiment. But it was not until he saw the results for himself that he fully realised the difference they had made. The Near East was all 'picturesque disorder' with 'purple patches and frayed edges'. There, although closer to Europe, the West had had scant influence on the Oriental style of government. In India, 'thanks to British rule, one felt at once the stability of an organized system working according to plan. The outward signs of Western civilization were far more frequent and tangible. It was not the tattered and battered East still struggling against the disciplined methods of the West.'⁵⁴

India cast a spell on Chirol. He would spend much of his later life trying to come to grips with the vast land, its myriad peoples and diverse religions, looking for ways to make the Anglo-Indian relationship beneficial to both parties. At times he was critical, vociferously, not only of what he occasionally called 'the land of regrets' but of its supposedly enlightened English rulers as well. Hinduism he found particularly troublesome. As much as he feared the fanaticism embedded in Islam, Chirol felt more comfortable with its monotheistic certainties than he ever did with the 'unending phantasmagoria of the Hindu pantheon'. The more time he spent in the subcontinent, the more he saw of the workings of this religious system, the more he found it responsible for what had happened in and to India. The caste system, in particular, was a dreadful scourge, its sorry by-product a 'drab melancholy which seemed to brood over the whole land... [and] paralyse the individual energies of the human soul...'.⁵⁵ Nor were the ruling classes any less unscrupulous in their pursuit of power than ruling classes in other parts of the world. When it came to the Brahmins,

there has never been in the whole world any class, which claiming to be the inspired exponent of a nation's religion, has asserted more pitilessly

and more successfully its right to absolute domination over body and soul...The whole history of India – of Hindu India – from the time of Asoka onwards is an almost unbroken record of squalid struggles for material domination from which the influence of those higher forces which we call spiritual have been as a rule conspicuously absent.⁵⁶

Having soaked up as much Indian history, geography, art, religion and politics as possible, Chirol turned his attention to his most singular mission in Persia. By the 1880s the arms race in Europe was already under way and a popular item in it was the Nordenfeldt quick-firing machine-gun. Chirol had come across Nordenfeldt in Turkey, where the arms business was brisk. Having been persuaded to try his luck with the Persian Shah, the enterprising Nordenfeldt needed a suitable representative to send, along with a sample gun, to Tehran. Chirol seemed the perfect man.

Gun and salesman set out on the 'royal road' to Tehran from the Gulf coast port of Bushire in the spring of 1884. The first task was to struggle up what seemed a mountainous staircase, each step a thousand feet high, and covered, when they got near the top, with heavy snow and black, freezing clouds. What struck Chirol, besides the sheer difficulty of staying on this 'royal road', was how alone he and his small group were. The landscape was stunning, but the solitude soon became oppressive; he and his bearers went day after day without seeing a single soul between the caravanserai left in the morning and the one entered at night. He looked in vain for the Persia of his boyhood reading, the land of philosophers and metaphysicians 'dreaming the dream of the soul's disentanglement'. Fabled Shiraz, 'shrunken and decayed', was a disappointment, and as he pressed north, through Persepolis and Isfahan, the realities of corruption and oppression on one hand and dull misery on the other left a permanent mark on his mind.⁵⁷

In Isfahan the Zill-es-Sultan, a son of the Shah and virtual ruler of southern Persia, commanded Chirol to demonstrate the power of his by then famous gun. This he did, much to the amazement and delight of the Zill, who sent him a tiny, early cucumber as a token of thanks. Not only was this an exceptional compliment, it was also expensive, 'for the princely orderly who brought it to me expected a present in return for his good offices, and delicately intimated that five tomans (£3) was the smallest "insult" which his pride would condescend to accept'.⁵⁸

It was more of the same in Tehran, but without the cucumber. The Shah sent him friendly messages promising to fix a date for the presentation, but Chirol could not afford to have the crates opened. He

cabled Nordenfeldt that the road to the palace, and to the throne itself, would have to be paved with gold. Every official, great and small, had his hand out. There was, even after that, no sure prospect of any serious business since the British minister was too Olympian to take any interest in Chirol, and his French counterpart, although far more friendly, could hardly concern himself with Chirol's business affairs. In the end he simply sent the gun back to Bushire the way that it had come.⁵⁹ He himself headed north, toward the Caspian, having decided, for his usual reasons, to go home by a route not yet explored.

Not only would the northern route be less arduous, it would be particularly interesting to him to see the first section of the Russian-built Trans-Caspian railway. The Russian Legation in Tehran seemed willing to help him but he only got as far as Khrasnovodsk, a port on the eastern shore of the Caspian. There he remained, a 'house guest' of the Governor-General, until transportation back in the direction he had come could be arranged.

What he had seen, rather what he had not been allowed to see, suggested to him that the Russians were intent on pushing, not only quickly, but quietly, into central Asia. They were also clearly determined to 'buy' the Shah. It took little insight to see that, if a railroad along the Russo-Persian border could carry Russian troops and goods to central Asia, it could bring them, just as efficiently, to the north-western approaches to India. All this spelled trouble, and Chirol was not alone in reading the message. But once out of Persia his mind was almost immediately diverted from the menace of Russian expansionism by adventures of a wholly different sort in an equally troublesome part of the world.

Chirol had first met George 'Chinese' Gordon in Cairo in 1878 when the latter was serving as Governor-General of the Sudan. Like many who met the charismatic soldier, Chirol was charmed to the point where he begged to be allowed to go back with him to Khartoum. He was too young, said Gordon, and too many young men were already buried in the Sudanese sands. On Chirol's return from Persia the two men met again at the Oliphants' house. There Chirol heard that Gordon was once again headed for the Sudan, this time to relieve the besieged garrison at Khartoum. He again begged to go along. In his memoirs Chirol claimed that Gordon agreed, but that the telegram containing this permission was somehow misdirected and never arrived.

In the end Chirol did go to the Sudan, part of the second of two relief columns organised for the purpose, unfortunately too late, of saving Gordon. During the winter of 1884–1885 he saw some 'sharp and rather

purposeless fighting': spearmen dashing themselves against troops armed with modern rifles and the very guns he had been pitching to the Persians. But bravery, even on the part of these primitive fanatics, moved him as bravery generally did. Long after he left Africa he claimed to be haunted by the image of a fallen warrior, 'a dark statue in bronze, than which none could be more finely modelled... with the fierce sun beating straight down upon it in the glare of the pitiless desert all around'.⁶⁰

By October of 1885 the peripatetic Chirol was back in Beirut, en route to Bulgaria and the further trials of Prince Alexander. The latest Balkan storm was sparked by a rising in eastern Rumelia, the object being the long-desired union with Bulgaria. It was complicated by the fact that Alexander – not at all happy with his Russian 'advisors' – backed the rebels, and the union.⁶¹ In an ironic twist, the Russians found themselves opposed to the very thing they had once tried so hard to achieve, a big Bulgaria. The new Tsar, Alexander III, cousin to Prince Alexander, was enraged by his 'puppet's' show of independence. In an attempt to hamstringing him he recalled all the Russian officers attached to the Bulgarian army, hoping thereby to fatally weaken any Bulgarian effort to protect their newly enlarged borders against the armed wrath of the Sultan, still the nominal ruler in eastern Rumelia. Unfortunately for the Tsar, the Sultan contented himself with threats and kept his soldiers at home, perhaps because he was well aware of Britain's support for the young Prince's project.⁶²

But this was the Balkans after all and by November there was fighting, not between Turks and Bulgarians, as St Petersburg wished, but between the Serbians and their suddenly much bigger neighbour. Fearing Bulgarian designs on Macedonia, the Serbs got in the first blow, a move they soon regretted. Alexander, at the head of his supposedly weakened troops, routed the invaders, chased them home and thrashed them again. At that point Austria, hating the idea of a large and powerful Bulgaria as much as the Russians hated the idea of an independent one, stepped in. They demanded an immediate armistice, backing it up with the threat of new fighting, this time against Austrian troops. Alexander had no choice but to comply.

When news of the initial Serbian attack reached London the *Standard* sent Chirol to cover the fighting. Since there wasn't much of it, the assignment was brief. But the eyes of Europe – civilian and military – were focused on Bulgaria just then and statesmen's 'minds were busy with the future of the country which had so narrowly escaped an overwhelming catastrophe, and was still exposed to so many dangers', all of which made

it worthwhile for Chirol to stay and watch as well.⁶³ The winter of 1885–1886 was an anxious, dreary time in shabby Sofia. The hospitals were full of wounded men; many families were in mourning. Parties, sporting events and other home-made amusements that diplomats got up to entertain themselves in out of the way places were rare, but not unknown. Instead they were busy sending and receiving messages concerning the peace terms with Serbia and the negotiations over eastern Rumelia then taking place in Constantinople.

Meanwhile Alexander, a hero to his simple subjects – and to Chirol – had garnered new enemies. Even in London, where a ‘charming’, and well-connected, Madame de Novikoff⁶⁴ enticed several papers, including W.T. Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette*, to carry damaging stories, the Prince was under attack. Unable to do much to defend him while in Sofia, Chirol got his chance in London. At home on a visit in June 1886, he was lunching with friends in the House of Commons dining room when Stead himself approached and asked to be introduced. Courtesies over, he bluntly asked Chirol what he had to say ‘about that blackguard, Prince Alexander’. ‘Blackguard yourself,’ was the response. Undeterred, but less aggressively, Stead continued. Why, he wanted to know, such an extreme reaction. With that Chirol, according to one of his companions, launched into a ‘masterly’ refutation of the Russian smears on Alexander’s moral character.⁶⁵

It was a defence that would have no doubt pleased Alexander, had he known of it, but it did nothing to save his crown. His defender was still in England when news came from Sofia that the Prince had been forcibly taken into Russia. Chirol himself left immediately for Sofia, and by the time he got there the Prince was back in his capital. But before two weeks were out Alexander, propelled by the Tsar’s barely veiled threat of armed interference, abdicated, got in his carriage, and rode out of Sofia for good. Travelling with him when he went was Valentine Chirol.

The latter was initially introduced to Alexander by Sir Frank Lascelles, then British Consul-General in Sofia. Lascelles, a close friend and sometime advisor to the Prince, was also in England as this final drama was being played out. Unlike Chirol the Consul-General did not hurry back, and Chirol always assumed that he had been asked to accompany the Prince either as a stand-in for the absent Lascelles or because of his connections with the *Standard*. These were plausible explanations, but it also seems that Chirol was more to Alexander than a second-string Lascelles or a well-connected publicist. It was as a personal friend that he was invited by Prince Henry Battenberg, Alexander’s older brother, to come to the

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Battenberg family seat in the summer of 1887. There Henry had gathered together, as Chirol related a decade later, 'a sort of *conseil de famille*...at which Prince Alexander's determination not to return to Bulgaria was once more discussed and vainly combated by his friends. Had [these] other views prevailed, the course of history might have been considerably altered!'⁶⁶

How, Chirol did not say, but he was surely thinking of the man who replaced Alexander, Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Kohary. Over the years the observant traveller had developed a sharp eye for many details, among them shades of character. The Prince's made a mark both early and permanently. At his first interview with Ferdy, as Chirol liked to call him, the new ruler remarked – with an air of what Chirol later remembered as 'affable condescension' – on his visitor's well-known admiration of Alexander. When Chirol replied that indeed the Alexander's greatest qualities – much to his political misfortune – had turned out to be of the heart rather than the head, 'Prince Ferdinand..., toying all the time with some precious stones which he held caressingly in his hand, looked me straight in the face and speaking for once the truth, remarked dryly: "*Eh bien, Monsieur, l'histoire ne dira pas cela de moi.*"'⁶⁷



Tirnova, Bulgaria, 1886. Valentine Chirol seated left.

His long months in Bulgaria profited Chirol in two important ways. Watching the almost constant, and frequently violent, manoeuvring for power and influence in that volatile corner of Europe sharpened his understanding of the intricacies of Great Power politics and the limits of diplomacy. In addition he made lasting friendships with a range of people who would prove to be of great value to him both personally and professionally. The eminent scholar-journalist, and sometime *Times* contributor, Mackenzie Wallace was one of these. They had met earlier in Constantinople but the mutual admiration that now began to grow up between them would soon enough give shape and structure to the younger man's life.

The Bulgarian 'imbroglio' was at the centre of Balkan unrest during much of the 1880s. By the end of the decade the Powers most concerned with that part of the world, Austria, Russia and England, had other irons in other fires and so cooperated to maintain a shaky status quo in south-eastern Europe.⁶⁸ The complicated web of alliances and agreements that characterised the last years of the Bismarckian era also allowed for a tenuous stability, and even when that fragile construct began to unravel after 1890 the Powers still worked, not always harmoniously to be sure, to keep the creaky structure from collapse. But the damping down of flash-points in an area so continually 'on the simmer' proved ultimately futile.

In the spring of 1890 Chirol's vagabond life took a totally new turn when he went back to London in order to keep terms at Lincoln's Inn. His goal was a career at the Egyptian Bar. As an Englishman familiar with Egypt and fluent in French – then the official language of the Egyptian courts – all that he needed was to learn the law. He applied himself with some diligence to that, but when new regulations allowed English to be used in the courts what he had counted on as his special 'pull' no longer pulled. In the end it mattered little as soon enough he was given another chance at journalism that not only suited him but for which he was already well trained.

In 1885, the 'Thunderer' celebrated its 100th birthday. It was, by then, as much a national institution as an ordinary commercial enterprise, certainly so in the eyes of its chief proprietor, John Walter III, and young, new editor, George Earle Buckle. As befitting an institution, the paper cultivated a aura of sedate timelessness, operating along the strict and sober lines laid down by Walter's father early in the century. The latest news, as much of it as possible, accurately written and printed was the first order of business. Accompanying the events of the day were 'ample and exact parliamentary, legal, academic, ecclesiastical... reports,

sound critical notices of theatrical and artistic events, full obituaries and independent foreign dispatches sent by expert correspondents'. Leading articles, 'written in correct English', told its readers where the paper stood and where they, if they were right-thinking, should as well.⁶⁹

These were admirable standards and had worked well for the best part of a century. But in an age when the common man was taught to read, but not necessarily to enjoy reading 'ample and exact' reports of academic, ecclesiastical and legal proceedings, they came under siege. The principles clung to so fiercely by Buckle and the Walters family had little in common with the 'new journalism' then coming into vogue; cheaper papers with sales figures on their proprietors' minds and sensation in their pages. Printing House Square remained untroubled; 'There was much in common,' it was said, 'between the halfpenny *Daily Mail* and the halfpenny *Daily Express*; there was nothing in common between either of them and *The Times*, price threepence.'⁷⁰

Noble principles were fine things, but a serene attitude did little or nothing to attract new readers. Stung by increasing competition, the Thunderer was feeling a financial pinch as it turned one hundred. Four years later the pinch became a punch. Thanks to having published a series of articles on 'Parnellism and Crime', part of an effort to derail Irish Home Rule and fatally damage the Irish Nationalist leader, by including in them incriminating letters purportedly written by him, the paper – having also pledged to defend the authenticity of those letters in court – ended up losing case, face and a great deal of money when they turned out to be forgeries. The loss of prestige was more or less overcome, the loss of the money,⁷¹ never. By 1890 *The Times* lacked not just capital but the services of its faithful, long-term manager, John Cameron MacDonald, killed off, it was said, by the strain of the whole messy, costly business.

In 1889 John Walter's son Arthur visited Egypt, where he was shown the sights by a knowledgeable and energetic Anglo-Egyptian by the name of Charles Frederic Moberly Bell. Bell, born in Egypt, educated briefly in England, had returned to Egypt to work in a commercial firm. But his heart was never in commerce; what he really liked to do was send in occasional articles on Egypt to *The Times*. Thanks to the quality of his work, especially his accounts of the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 – during which he met another budding journalist by the name of Valentine Chirol – he was made the paper's 'own' correspondent in Egypt, then and there turning his back on a life in commerce. Like Chirol, Bell was slated to go off with Gordon on his ill-starred mission to the Sudan in 1884. Again like Chirol, fate stepped in to preserve

him so that, in the end, he could spend his life trying to preserve *The Times*.

Arthur Walter was deeply impressed by Bell's enthusiasm and irrepressible vigour. With MacDonald dead, the paper's finances in shambles, circulation declining and he himself about to take the helm at Printing House Square, he needed help. Before the year was out Bell was sitting in MacDonald's empty chair, working full tilt to stem the outgoing tide of readers and funds, scouting for ways to attract younger readers and investigating new techniques of advertising and salesmanship. Although finances were always his first concern at Printing House Square, foreign correspondence remained his first love, and until the last he remained not merely interested but involved in that side of *The Times*.

The idea of setting up a separate foreign department was in large part Bell's, and it was he who dealt with practical aspects such as fixing salaries and apportioning expenses. He liked to stay in touch with certain of the correspondents, particularly those in the most sensitive or important posts, and so would write to them of home politics or pass along pertinent information gleaned from a wide circle of political, diplomatic and business friends. But, given all his other responsibilities at Printing House Square, this correspondence was necessarily intermittent. He had scant time to devote to determining what the paper's foreign 'line' should be on a constantly growing array of problems and developments, let alone edit incoming dispatches, advise men scattered across the globe on local 'angles', or provide them with specially tailored instructions and introductions. Those things, and here Bell and Buckle were in full agreement, should be handled by a foreign editor, or foreign advisor, as he was briefly called. The two men also agreed that such a job must be given to the most highly experienced foreign 'specialist' then available. Almost inevitably their eyes turned to another of the paper's intermittent correspondents, Donald Mackenzie Wallace.

Wallace was more than fitted to head the new foreign department and quite willing to give it a try, if rather secretive about the appointment. 'Do you know,' Chirol wrote to Frank Lascelles in November 1891, 'that Mackenzie Wallace has joined *The Times* again? He does not wish it talked about overmuch at present, but he has undertaken to act as General Adviser on Foreign Affairs to Printing House Square, where he sits every night in judgment on the foreign news...'⁷²

It was high time, it seems, that somebody 'sat in judgment' on what was then passing for foreign news at Printing House Square. The palmy days of brilliant scoops and stars – Russell in the Crimea and the American

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Civil War, Oliphant in Paris, Frank Power in the Sudan with General Gordon and Wallace himself bringing back the terms of the Treaty of Berlin in the lining of his coat – seemed to be over. Henri Stefan Oppen de Blowitz, doyen of *The Times*' correspondents, still 'shone' intermittently in Paris. Irrepressibly buoyant and inventive, the little Hungarian cared about the news, also about his audience. Determined to be both entertaining *and* informative,

he knew how to secure confidences [and] ever had something to give in exchange for news. He got it from everywhere...in effect [he] conducted a news exchange of his own. The danger of such an arrangement was that Blowitz could not verify what his friends told him and the office could not be sure whether Blowitz's news was accurate or not, nor whether the motives of his friends, and the effects they sought to produce, were in the interests of British policy.⁷³

In an age of keen competition the paper could no longer condone either his methods or his style. For Wallace, a sober Scot concerned as much for the diplomatic effect of a dispatch as for its immediate news value, Blowitz was trial, nuisance and danger rolled into one suitably ball-shaped figure. The first foreign editor began his tenure insisting on having facts from his correspondents, hard facts traceable not only to real, but also reliable, sources. Informed comment could be used to explain and instruct but not until the facts had been made plain. Impartiality was scarcely less important. System and structure were to Wallace what impressions and sentiment were to Blowitz and it was soon clear that at Printing House Square the Blowitz era was nearing its end. Wallace was looking for newsmen more to his own taste, men like Valentine Chirol.

Although Chirol knew Wallace first, and initially rather better, it was Bell who became Chirol's intimate friend, the large Bell clan his family, their house a second home. It was Bell who came to him in the autumn of 1891 with the idea of working for *The Times*. For his part Wallace had been busy 'preparing the way' for him should he 'be inclined to return to that sort of work'.⁷⁴ Chirol was flattered, but not so flattered as to accept without conditions. He made it clear that he neither could nor would write to order, nor for any paper inclined to give international news short shrift. Nor did he want to jettison his connection at Lincoln's Inn. All the same he enjoyed the idea of working with Wallace. 'Our views on the way in which the work should be done are in such complete agreement,' he told Lascelles, 'that I should not have any anxiety as to reasonable liberty of action, and with such a guarantee of proper attention being paid at

headquarters to foreign affairs, one might hope to be able to do really useful and important work.⁷⁵ One might do even more than hope, as Wallace also made clear, that once the paper was well and truly established in its 'new groove', he might be the paper's second foreign editor.

Obviously tempted by the prospect of having, in the interim, a 'roving mission' in the East, i.e. the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Chirol rather oddly announced that he had got to a point in his life when he no longer wanted to be so constantly on the move. What he went on to describe as a more 'settled' life did not sound very stayed put, as he claimed to have no objection

to spending seven or eight months every year abroad, but I do want to have some time at home. Of course I could not expect to do that if there were any serious crisis abroad, nor should I want to, as it would interest me to be at the centre of '*les evenements*'. But I want a clear understanding on that point, & there's the rub. However Wallace really wants me, I believe, so he will doubtless do his best to get the matter settled satisfactorily.⁷⁶

Also still to be settled was the matter of Arthur Walter's approval. Until that was arranged all the discussions with Wallace and Bell as to his terms and theirs could only be academic. Walter was then away from England. While waiting for his return, Bell decided to give Chirol the temporary task of managing Dalziel's News Agency, just recently taken under the wing of Printing House Square. Dalziel himself would continue to take care of the business side of things, but as he had no experience of press work, nor of European politics, all of that would be given over to Chirol. Wire service news agencies were then in their infancy and, according to the somewhat disapproving Chirol, it was a deservedly precarious one. According to him *The Times* had taken on Dalziel's

with the purpose partly of stimulating Reuters by a little wholesome competition and partly, or perhaps chiefly, in the hope that the two rival agencies may ultimately succeed in cutting each others throat & thus deal a death blow to the whole system of News Agencies which are necessarily injurious to a great daily paper.⁷⁷

As much as he deplored the overtones of mass marketing in disposing of snippets of news, if an outfit such as Dalziel's was not going to fade away of its own accord, being in charge of it would at least put him into a position to steer it into a 'new and more rational groove'. The more he considered his prospects the more he warmed to the idea, and soon enough overcame his hesitations to the point where he could claim that Dalziel's might well be capable of 'important development'. Moreover,

Chirol was seconded to Dalziel on the strict understanding that he was a *Times* man and would be free to leave as soon as or whenever the paper needed his services elsewhere. In the meanwhile, since the work would mean spending a good deal of his time in London, he could continue to keep terms at Lincoln's Inn. Last, but far from least, he could use the money. Even if the job would keep him 'more closely tied by the leg than I have for a long time past or indeed ever been accustomed to... there is no harm in that. In fact I have been having rather too much of the "*dolce far niente*" to be good for me.'⁷⁸

Although Chirol thus began life at Dalziel's with reasonable hopes and good intentions, things soon went sour. Given his initial reservations about news agencies, Dalziel understandably balked when asked to transform, to death, his own creation. As for Chirol, he was no more positive about leaving than he had been about joining the agency in the first place. He felt mildly sorry for himself and imagined that Wallace

has met with more opposition than he expected from Arthur Walter, who for some to me unknown reason is not & never has been well disposed towards me. Failing that, I do not quite see what I could do... [But] I should be sorry at the present moment to remain 'unemployed', for not only would it be distasteful to me, but I could not properly afford it.⁷⁹

For more or less a decade – between 1880, when he worked under Edgar Whitaker on the *Levant Herald*, and 1890, when he began to read for the Bar at Lincoln's Inn – he had supported himself, at least in part, by occasional journalism. He had also come into a small inheritance from one of his Ashburnham relations. This useful little windfall had come, in part, in the form of Australian stocks, and in the autumn of 1891, curious to see for himself the sources of his dividends, Chirol set off for that remote continent.

Like generations of visitors before and after, he was charmed by its natural wonders – animal, vegetable, mineral. The human element he did not find at all charming although at one point, obviously struggling to find some semblance of balance, he alluded to there still being some 'sturdy, manly stuff' among the 'scourings of our Islands, bloated with strong meat and strong drink and enormous wages lightly earned and lightly spent, and free from the accumulated restraints of centuries which are still so potent over here'. Democracy, something he never brought himself to trust, had been given a 'fair field' in which to develop out there, and he was particularly horrified at what the demos had done with it.

A WORLDLY EDUCATION

Nowhere has it shown itself more selfish and more ignorant, more prone to follow blindly the lead of blind leaders, and more impatient of any restraint based upon the experience of the past, more reckless in mortgaging the future, more unworthy of the great inheritance into which it has stumbled. It is rather a saddening spectacle and apt to destroy many cherished illusions as to the upward evolution of mankind...⁸⁰

What he saw persuaded him that his money would be safer in an Australian bank than in Australian shares, but no sooner was he back in the reliably refined and dignified 'old world' than the bank failed. Further losses also threatened and a general depression in London did not help. All things considered he came to the conclusion that 'it might be wiser not to chuck away a good salary, if I could secure certain concessions to render my present position more satisfactory or at least tolerable'.⁸¹

Within two months a completely different prospect lay before the disgruntled Chirol. Brinsley Richards, *The Times'* 'Own' correspondent in Berlin, had recently died. Bell proposed William Lavino, then in Vienna, for the post, but Wallace pushed for Chirol. It was Chirol, more than Bell, who needed to be convinced that the idea was a good one. Both foreign editor and manager laid great stress on the vital importance of having the best possible man in the German capital. William II was young and still new in his role and no one could be certain how he might make use of his formidable power. Chirol, keeping an eye on his cherished liberty of action, agreed to go but only if he were guaranteed that he would not be locked away in central Europe, but free to be sent on special missions elsewhere in the world. And so he went off to Berlin, one month short of his 40th birthday, to begin a career that brought him great distinction in his lifetime and undeserved obscurity following it.

Wallace was very pleased to have snared Chirol, but at least one of the latter's friends disagreed. 'Higher my boy I would pitch your flight!' wrote his diplomatist friend Nicholas O'Connor. While Berlin was definitely preferable to Vienna, Constantinople would have been better still and Rome best of all. Italy, 'the land of poetry, art and romance', was where he should be, not, perhaps, in point of view of profession but because it would provide a 'pleasanter life, better climate, number of nice English who pass the winter there and also because there you might have made a home with your mother and lived very comfortably...and eventually migrate to Paris or return to London to cut pastures new and larger fields of ambition'. What these larger fields might be he didn't say. When O'Connor sent these self-confessed 'less than sincere' congratulations to Chirol he himself was en route to Peking to serve as head of the British

DIPLOMAT WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Legation. He hated the idea that the two of them would be so far apart, 'exiles' in different parts of the world. But then, having perhaps reconsidered his negative attitude, he concluded his letter with the thought that, at least, 'at a very critical moment like this I have no doubt your life [in Berlin] will be deeply interesting'.⁸²

O'Connor did not specify what it was that made the moment so particularly critical. The Sultan was making noises about reasserting his control in Egypt, and there was trouble among the Armenians in Turkey. In Europe – with the everlasting exception of the Balkans – things were relatively calm. As Chirol made his final preparations for the move to Berlin, domestic concerns and problems were to the fore across the Continent. Russia, pursuing a rapid industrialisation programme as well as an agreement with France, was hard hit by famine. The German government was busy negotiating a series of important commercial treaties with her European neighbours. France, torn by socialist and anarchist unrest, was digesting the unsavoury revelations of the great Panama Scandal. In Britain preparations were under way for a general election to be fought on the issue of home rule for Ireland. It did not look as if there was anything critical looming on the Anglo-German horizon.

3 Berlin

Unter den Linden ran like an arrow through the heart of Wilhelmine Berlin. A grand, ceremonial avenue, lined with its fragrant namesake trees, the Linden was a good place for marching bands, marching armies or Germans flaunting their new prosperity. At its eastern end sat the vast imperial Schloss with its neighbouring Dom. From these suitably weighty examples of German might and rectitude, the way lay west to the blunt outline of the Brandenburger Tor. The opera was on this boulevard, and the university where Treitschke's hymns to Prussian power were sung. And as of April 1892, Valentine Chirol lived on it in a small, sunny flat at number 53. A few steps away was the intersection with the Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin's Whitehall, home to the Chancellor's palace, the Foreign Office and other buildings filled with German bureaucrats toiling away on the affairs of Prussia and the Reich. Geographically speaking, he was in the very centre of things. With little ado he soon found his way into the centre of less concrete aspects of the city as well.

Chirol was more of a success in Berlin than the city was with him. He found its landscape flat, architecture ostentatious, climate damp and chill and climate of opinion arrogant. There were too many rules and regulations, too many policemen to enforce them and too much vice in spite of it all. He made pointed comparisons with the Biblical 'cities of the plain' and thought fondly of beautiful Paris, stately London and of exotic Cairo. The Prussians were efficient, not exotic.