



Viceroys: The Creation of the British

Christopher Lee

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Between 1858 and 1947, twenty British men ruled millions of some of the most remarkable people of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

From the Indian Mutiny to the cruel religious partition of India and the newly formed and named Pakistan, the Viceroy had absolute power, more than the monarch who had sent him. Selected from that exclusive class of English, Scottish and Irish breeding, the aristocracy, the Viceroys were plumed, rode elephants, shot tigers. Even their wives stood when they entered the room. Nevertheless, many of them gave everything for India. The first Viceroy, Canning, exhausted by the Mutiny, buried his wife in Calcutta before he left the subcontinent to die shortly afterwards.

The average Viceroy lasted five years and was granted an earldom but rarely a sense of triumph. Did these Viceroys behave as badly as twenty-first century moralists would have us believe? When the Raj was over, the legacy of Empire continued, as the new rulers slipped easily into the offices and styles of the British who had gone. Being 'British' was now a caste.

Viceroy is the tale of the British Raj, the last fling of British aristocracy. It is the supreme view of the British in India, portraying the sort of people who went out and the sort of people they were on their return. It is the story of utter power and what men did with it. Moreover, it is also the story of how modern British identity was established and in part the answer to how it was that such a small offshore European island people believed themselves to have the right to sit at the highest institutional tables and judge what was right and unacceptable in other nations and institutions.

Viceroy: The Creation of the British Details

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