



Daughters of the Empire: A Memoir of Life and Times in the British Raj

Iris Macfarlane

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Iris Macfarlane's vividly coloured memoir covers a hundred year period when four generations of her maternal line lived as white memsahibs in British India. It contains a forward by her son Alan Macfarlane, Emeritus Professor at Cambridge and Life Fellow of King's College, and an extensive introduction by Susan Bayly, Reader in Historical Anthropology at Cambridge and Fellow of Christ's College. In the forward Alan writes..."The days of the British Empire are now over, and the Jewel has been released from the Crown. It is becoming increasingly difficult to penetrate beneath the surface of those years, to see the emotions and ideas which shaped and were shaped by the imperial mission. I believe that my mother has had a number of advantages which has made it possible for her to do something very unusual. Firstly there are her own talents. Sharp observation, a philosophical mind, cutting wit, self-deprecatory style, all these combined with beautiful writing have helped her to capture herself and her subjects. She can write with depth from her own experience, but also live past generations through that shared knowledge of the world of India and Britain. Then there is the unusual advantage of having a mother, Violet (who brought me up) a great story-teller and keeper of memories. In her late eighties, she handed down to Iris much of the information in this book and providing a bridge back to the later nineteenth century. Finally, my family is a great keeper of documents and photographs; sets of diaries, letters and other papers and illustrations give a first-hand richness to the hunt for these vanished worlds. It is difficult to know what to compare this book to; a mixture of Trollope, Jane Austen and many of the classic accounts of the Raj I suppose. I believe that with its honesty, self-questioning and stringent critique it will be an invaluable source for those who are trying to understand the Raj. It also opens up the world of Victorian and Edwardian women, and more generally that world which gave birth to our own, whether we are British, Indian or world citizens in the aftermath of imperial expansion."

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