CHAPTER 3

From Enniskillen to Nairobi: The Coles in British East Africa

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In the opening decades of the twentieth century a close connection was forged between Ireland and British East Africa (or the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya as it became in 1920) by three of the children of the fourth Earl of Enniskillen: Florence Cole (b. 1878), Galbraith Lowry Cole (b. 1881) and Reginald Berkeley Cole (b. 1882). All three were part of the pioneering settlement of the East African territory in the wake of the Boer War and through the course of the First World War—events which in turn served as portals to colonial land-purchase more widely across the African continent. During this period their letters to friends or home to Florence Court, the family's ancestral seat in County Fermanagh, provide an intriguing portrait of these Ulster-born aristocrats and their participation in Britain's colonial expansion and consolidation. The siblings also feature in literary accounts and memoirs of Kenya by Elspeth Huxley, Karen Blixen and various other authors who were their contemporaries in the formative years of the Protectorate. Such recollections inevitably nuance and often romanticise the pioneer culture of British East Africa but remain one of the few resources available for recovering this transient Irish presence in the imperial landscape (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2).

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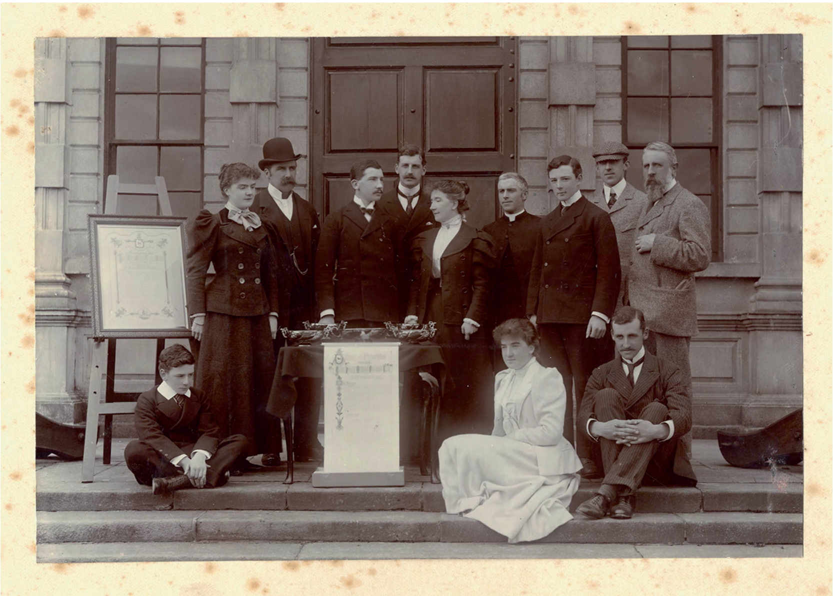

Fig. 3.1 The fourth Earl of Enniskillen with family and senior estate servants at Florence Court, County Fermanagh. (Enniskillen Papers, by kind permission of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland)

The experiences of the three Coles also highlight the intermittent dovetailing of Ireland and British East Africa as they each passed through defining stages of territorial and legislative realignment in the first two decades of the century. An Irish chronology from the agitations of the third Home Rule Bill to the 1916 Rising, and in turn the Civil War and the frangible arrangements of partition—with the new border looped across lands just a few miles south of Florence Court itself—runs in a temporal parallel to the evolution of British East Africa from an insecure protectorate, carved out expediently between Mombasa and the Ugandan border in the 1890s, to a designated crown colony in 1920. Indeed, by 1922, the year that saw the publication of Lord Lugard's landmark manifesto for continued imperial intervention, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, the confluence of Irish Free State and Kenya Colony's "political calendars" marks what Michael North has identified as the beginning of the postcolonial era.[1] In bridging the two locations, the Enniskillen family illuminates the

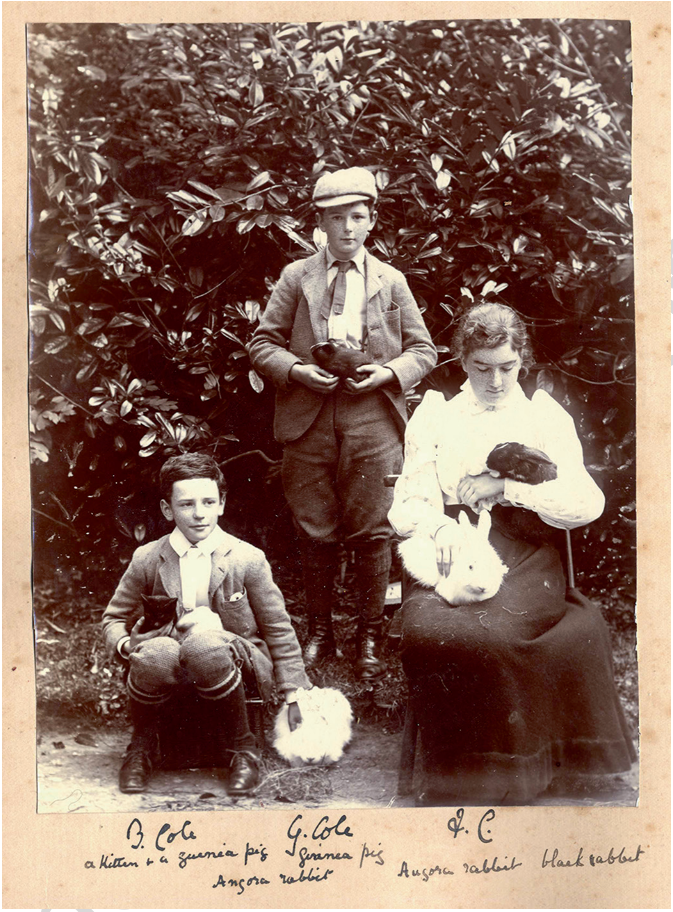
B. Cole
a Kitten + a guenea pig
Angora rabbit
G. Cole
guinea pig
F. C
Angora rabbit
black rabbit

Fig. 3.2 Berkeley, Galbraith and Florence Cole as children at Florence Court, County Fermanagh. (Enniskillen Papers, by kind permission of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland)

convoluted patterns of refraction, replication and irony that frequently characterise Irish liaisons with the wider projects of Britain's imperial mission.

Growing up at the Florence Court estate, just eight miles south of Fermanagh's county town of Enniskillen, the Cole children were immersed in provincial Ireland's highly developed sense of affiliation to an international imperial culture. At home, the family's archive records a long history of overseas administrative and military service in outposts such as Madras (Chennai), the Cape Province and Mauritius, and also evidence of their sustained interest in the development of the colonies (a scrapbook in the Enniskillen Papers includes, for example, newspaper cuttings about the "Africa and the East Exhibition" held in Belfast's Ulster Hall in 1910).[2] These interests were reinforced by the local culture and economy. While Fermanagh itself was largely Catholic and agricultural, the civic life of Enniskillen epitomised a Protestant unionist sensibility tuned to the frequencies of the Empire, a connection underpinned by the town's castle garrison, which quartered the long-serving cavalry regiment of the Inniskilling Dragoon Guards—veterans of the Boyne, Waterloo and Balaclava—and the more recently established Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Set far over to the western periphery of Britain's imperial landscape, Enniskillen was nonetheless closely linked to the heartlands of the Empire through its commercial investments, with its shops and businesses fuelled by the commodities of colonial enterprise and its main post office advertising daily delivery rates to Zanzibar, the Cape and South Africa.[3] The town's connections to London, meanwhile, had been smoothed by the merging of several local train lines throughout the later nineteenth century into the Great Northern Line railway, which ran the 120 miles to Dublin for the boat passage through Wales to England. This was the route taken by the Cole daughters when they travelled across for the London society "season," and by the Cole brothers making the same journey each term to attend school at Eton.

After completing their schooling, the boys followed their older brother John to the Military Academy at Woolwich before taking up army commissions, Galbraith with the 10th Hussars, Berkeley with the 9th Lancers. Both were called up separately for duty relatively late on in the Second Boer War, sailing from Southampton for the Cape Colony over the winter of 1900–1901. The War itself was petering out to a ragged conclusion. Galbraith's regiment saw some action at Uniondale but was mostly exercised by chasing down rogue Boer units across the Transvaal; Berkeley was put to work on the more demoralising task of farm clearances, a legacy of Lord Roberts' punitive strategy against Boer civilians. Aside from the brutalities and ignominy of these military duties however, the brothers were both enchanted with Africa from their first view of the landscape on arriving at the Cape, where the mountain above the bay immediately reminded

Berkeley of the Cuilcaigh mountain behind Florence Court. Their letters home in this period list the deprivations and tedium of military routine together with their many illnesses (including malaria, sciatica and rheumatic fever that would dog both of them for the rest of their lives), but they also detail the richness of their new environment with its vast open spaces and vibrant colours. Galbraith would often ride out of camp at night to sleep under the stars with only a horse blanket as protection against the biting cold, while Berkeley sent home for his camera and rolls of film so that he could try to record the local wildlife, including the regiment of tortoises that, much to his delight, assembled each morning outside his tent.[4]

Their sister Florence, meanwhile, had married Hugh Cholmondeley, the third Baron Delamere, a notoriously accident-prone aristocrat adventurer who would come to be regarded as one of the founders of modern Kenya. Delamere first encountered the East African Protectorate after cutting a route through the bush and swamp from Somaliland in 1895 and had decided to return there to invest in livestock farming.[5] In 1899, while back home at Vale Royal in Cheshire, he became engaged to Florence Cole. They married in a high-profile society wedding held in London's Knightsbridge, at which the bridesmaids wore shamrock-shaped brooches given as gifts by the groom in honour of his new Irish connection.[6] The Delameres then departed almost immediately for Africa, Florence exchanging the glamorous routines of debutante society for what was—initially at least—a fairly comfortless existence in a pair of mud-floored huts in the African wilderness. In 1904 Delamere established more solid lodgings, known as "Equator Ranch," on an expansive 100,000 acre lease granted by the Crown Lands Ordinance on the western rim of the Great Rift Valley. It was still a rough lifestyle for the couple, the dangers of smallpox, ticks, snakes, malaria and locusts combining with the inevitable isolation of the new settlement, but in the early years Florence appears to have endured it reasonably well: a *Country Life* feature from December 1906, preserved in the family's cuttings, pictures her cheerfully planting a flower garden and running the dairy on her husband's "African estate." The feature also recorded the couple's close relations with the nomadic Masai, something that would underpin the strength of all three Cole siblings' integration in Africa (both brothers learned to speak Masai and Berkeley compiled a basic English-Masai vocabulary list, collected with his papers). "Lord Delamere is the only settler of importance who employs Masai," the *Country Life* article reported, "but he, and perhaps especially Lady

Delamere, who speaks these native dialects, has succeeded in so winning their affection that no difficulty is experienced in controlling them."[7]

Gradually the Delameres expanded their land and livestock holdings and established a small social circle among white settlers. They regularly hosted visitors to the country, including a young Winston Churchill who stayed with them on his visit to the Protectorate in 1907, joining in enthusiastically with Delamere's pig-sticking and lion-hunting sorties.[8] In 1910, they took on a larger enterprise near Soysambo in the Rift Valley. But Florence, who had left the couple's infant son at home in the care of family, was increasingly alone on the ranch, with the responsibility of managing the native staff, the livestock and the dairy while Delamere travelled to purchase sheep or to go on hunting safaris. In 1911 she suffered a breakdown and went home, returning to Africa only briefly before her death from heart failure in 1914 at the age of 36. "She had all the charm, wit and sparkle expected of the Irish, as well as generosity of spirit and loyalty to a husband who, while not unkind or probably not unfaithful, gave more of his heart to his dreams and schemes for the growth of his adopted land than to his wife's happiness," recalled Elspeth Huxley: "[T]hat was the lot of many European wives and few complained."[9]

Florence Cole's experience of early pioneering life in British East Africa coincided with the boom period for white settlement in the Protectorate. At the turn of the century there were only a handful of white inhabitants, mainly colonial officials linked to the Imperial East Africa Company, set up in 1888 with an office in Mombasa. This community increased with the development of the new railway line—the so-called lunatic express—an extraordinary feat of engineering undertaken largely by imported Indian labourers and constructed at huge expense to link the coast to Lake Victoria and Uganda, with the aim of gaining easier access to the Nile.[10] Europeans were welcomed with 99-year leases on land frequently already inhabited by native tribes, leading to a sequence of messy and controversial attempts at the relocation of the Kikuyu and Masai.[11] For white settlers, civic life was still limited: early twentieth-century Nairobi was little more than a shanty town built to service railway construction workers, but with the arrival of new pioneers it began to develop a thin veneer of colonial society. Delamere advertised for English planters from his native Cheshire to join him in Africa, and his wife wrote to her two younger brothers, Galbraith and Berkeley, now released from their military engagements, suggesting they come out from Ireland to try their hand at farming the land.

The story of Delamere and the Cole brothers, the "livestock barons of the Rift Valley" as Elspeth Huxley dubs them in her memoir *Out in the Midday Sun*, takes on legendary qualities in the accounts of Kenya's several memoirists, all of whom testify to the extraordinary initiative and resilience of this trio while downplaying their part in the embryonic administration's exploitation of the East African Protectorate's natural resources. Several repeat for example, the story of how in 1904, a newly arrived Galbraith Cole encountered the impossibly steep gradient of the Rift Valley slope up to his allotted land beyond Thomson's Falls and calmly dismantled his wagons to carry them up the escarpment, wheel by wheel, undaunted by the herds of rhino that surrounded him as he reached the plains above the valley floor.[12] Like his brother-in-law Delamere, Galbraith saw many of his early experiments with livestock on his new farm end in failure as cattle and sheep imported from Australia and New Zealand proved too small, or too susceptible to disease, the night-time cold or marauding wild animals to survive in Africa. Even the construction of drainage and irrigation systems was a constant battle against the elements and without the benefit of trained ranch hands. Enduring these difficulties added to the mythology of these early white settlers in Kenya's colonial folklore, with their strength of character read repeatedly as a justification, in itself, of their appropriation of the country. "Like most of these pioneers the Coles and the Delameres were imbued with a tenacious courage which accepts defeat, and tries again," one memoirist observes. "It is true that land was bought cheaply by people of great wealth. But as they grappled with problems, and watched great herds of imported pedigree cattle dwindle with new viruses which they could not counteract, the coming to terms with nature's stern rules was an arduous and sometimes hopeless process. It took a special brand of perseverance to cope with disappointment."[13]

For Galbraith Cole, however, farming life in the new colony became disastrously caught up in the precarious balancing act between white-settler autonomy and native rights. His second farm at Kekopey was next to the new Masai reserve and was regularly invaded, according to reports, by Masai poachers in search of cattle. In 1911, Cole fired a shot at a party of cattle-thieves; one of the poachers was hit and subsequently died. The incident was brought to the governor's attention and set up as something of a test case for colonial relations. "No local jury would convict Cole of any major crime," records Bertram (Lord) Cranworth in his memoir *Kenya Chronicles*, "and the tribe in question, with whom the punishment for cattle-stealing from time immemorial had been death, saw no justifiable grounds for complaint."[14] The affair reads rather differently in a transcript of the trial assembled by the Danish writer Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), another contemporary, whose version of events—though still sympathetic to Cole—puts a less ambiguous spin on the affair.

> The judge said to Galbraith, "It's not, you know, that we don't understand that you shot only to stop the thieves."
>
> "No," Galbraith said, "I shot to kill. I said that I would do so."
>
> "Think again, Mr Cole," said the judge. "We are convinced that you only shot to stop them."
>
> "No, by God," Galbraith said. "I shot to kill."[15]

The episode itself is blurred by the likely embellishments of such memoir accounts. A central fact remains however: Galbraith Cole was sentenced to immediate deportation from the territory. Given the volatile politics of settler-tribal relations, it was felt that he should serve as an example of democratic white justice and he was expelled from the Protectorate in September of 1911. Back home in Florence Court he was miserable and frustrated, writing to friends of his distress and disorientation on being banished from Africa. After almost three years in exile he managed to return as far as Zanzibar where, on hearing that war had broken out, he jumped ship and sailed for 26 stormy hours in a chartered dhow to Mombasa. At the port he tracked down his brother Berkeley who took him back to his farm, until Galbraith was discovered and ejected from the country once again. He was saved this time however, by the outbreak of the War in the summer of 1914. He shaved off his moustache, assumed a false name and managed to get himself taken on by the military, re-entering the Protectorate in the guise of an army stockman charged with shepherding a large herd of goats to Nairobi.[16]

From this point on, Galbraith Cole retreated to a relatively quiet life on his farm at Kekopey, near Gilgil on the shores of Lake Naivasha, his life increasingly constrained by worsening bouts of the rheumatoid arthritis that had first afflicted him during the Boer War. An unexpectedly detailed portrait of him during this period comes from the British writer Llewellyn Powys, later the author of a vivid modernist Africa-set memoir, *Black Laughter* (1924). Powys came to Africa in the hope that the climate would help his tuberculosis, and in 1914 took over from his brother Willie—who had enlisted in the army—as the farm manager on Galbraith Cole's ranch, where he stayed until the end of the War. The relationship between the two men was surprisingly warm: Powys was sympathetic to the debilitated Cole and came to regard him as a fellow intellectual in the midst of the wilderness, Galbraith meanwhile recognised his new employee’s literary interests and asked him to assemble a gentleman’s library for the house at Kekopey. Powys’s writings based on this period, including *Black Laughter* and his shorter piece, “Diary of an African Sheep Farm,” contain detailed accounts of the everyday hardships of life on the ranch as Cole attempted to maintain a sheep-farming business in the face of disease (both livestock and human, including bubonic plague), wild animals, recurrent drought and famine. His correspondence similarly portrays this difficult environment but also emphasises the intellectual range and capacity of his employer. “Cole is a great satisfaction and consolation to me,” Powys wrote to his brother in 1916: “he may be as hard as flint and crafty as a snake, and cold as ice, but by jove he has a brain and one can say anything to him, and he will switch his brain onto it and ferret it out. He has more intelligence than anybody in East Africa and more distinction of mind.”[17]

Galbraith’s younger brother Berkeley Cole is a more familiar figure in the history of British East Africa, at least in the version of him that emerges from Karen Blixen’s 1937 literary memoir *Out of Africa* (better known through director Sydney Pollack’s much romanticised 1985 screen adaptation). Berkeley’s real-life story is sometimes difficult to retrieve from beneath a cinematic gloss. Certainly, he seems to have been a more dashing figure than Galbraith. Having arrived in the Protectorate shortly after his brother, he bought land high up at Narro Meru, a location fed by a clear natural trout stream running down from the flanks of Mount Kenya and populated by gazelle, zebra, warthog, rhino and leopards.[18] Initially he involved himself in the timber trade, foresting cedar, camphor and podocarpus on a 3000-acre site north of Nyeri, working alongside another Boer War veteran and new arrival to the colony, Bertram Cranworth. “Cole knew much more about the business than I ever did,” Cranworth later reported. “He was a natural mechanic, and saws, circular or band, represented no mystery to him. Furthermore he was the big noise in the district, and our bad debts among the settlers were consequently comparatively few.”[19] Having access to plentiful timber, Berkeley also flirted with hotel building in a now fast-expanding Nairobi, but his real interest was livestock, particularly horses. Together with yet another fellow old-Etonian adventurer, Denys Finch Hatton, he set up in horse trading in Abyssinia and helped to establish the new race course at Nairobi.[20] And in 1914, he was the founding member of Nairobi's notorious Muthaiga Social Club. "[I]n an unusual outburst of respectability he said that he was sick of being treated like a pig," Cranworth recalls, "and that he yearned for a club of a refined nature where, when you wanted a drink, you rang the bell and it was brought to you on a spotless tray." The bar of the Muthaiga Club became the favoured watering-hole for the colony's expanding white community (or its male constituents at least) of civil servants, merchants, hunters and entrepreneurs, while in the grounds its members played cricket and polo, the latter allowing Berkeley Cole to offload his imported Abyssinian ponies onto numerous lukewarm customers.[21]

Meanwhile, events in Ireland (and after 1914, in France) cast their long shadow over the formative years of the East African settlement. As Donal Lowry observes, the Irish Home Rule crisis in parliament reverberated across the settler communities of the Empire, with echoes of Ulster's vocal loyalist resistance sounding throughout the first half of the twentieth century in Rhodesia, Natal and what would become Kenya.[22] The wariness of Irish aristocrat imperialism in Africa was heightened by the perceived threat of London's creeping disengagement from its colonial attachments, and the added insult of the 1916 Rising further reinforced hard-line unionist perspectives. John Cole wrote home from France, where he was serving with the North Ireland Horse Brigade, to suggest that the British Chief Secretary, Augustine Birrell, "ought to be hung beside Casement" for his disastrous failure to quell the insurgency, and to express his relief that his father was safe and well, having heard reports that members of Dublin's Kildare Street Club, on their way home from the Fairyhouse races, had been seized by the rebels and kept as hostages: "…the idea of you languishing in a papist guard room is too aweful (*sic*)," he wrote. The war would exact its own revenge, he added later, once conscription was introduced, as he hoped it soon would be. "There will be great play dragging the papists off the mountains," he enthused. "All my men are looking forward to the papists being made to join."[23]

The continuities of domestic loyalism were complicated however, by the complex positioning of those witnessing the War abroad. In Africa the two younger Cole brothers were kept abreast of events at home in Florence Court, where their father had leased land to the War Office for practice trenches. By this stage, Galbraith and Berkeley Cole were caught up in ironic refractions of Irish political themes, as tensions in the Protectorate increased, partly over the continuing question of securing native land rights but more pressingly over local political hierarchies, with the white settlers (numbering 8000 in 1916) desperately seeking to maintain supremacy over a significantly larger Indian cohort of over 20,000.[24] In a knock-on effect of this demographic instability, the outbreak of war simultaneously elicited from white settlers a range of embryonic nationalist sentiments relating to the concept of British East Africa as a distinct entity, a *country*—not just an imperial land-grab—to be saved from the expansionist ambitions of neighbouring German East Africa. Newly returned after his deportation adventure, Galbraith Cole was adamant that the British Protectorate had an independent identity in its own right, and one worth fighting for. He railed against the crippling arthritis that rendered him unable to join a regiment in France. "I think I know something now of the feelings of women when they are obliged to be inactive and await results," he wrote to a friend in the spring of 1915, insisting too that "I should like to be there but even if I were fit, I should consider it incumbent on me to help *this* country. It annoys me very much to hear people here say they want to go home and that fighting here is rot, etc. *This* is their country and I consider they ought to do their best to help here. Supposing everyone went home we shouldn't hold this country long."[25]

The confusion over the exact status of "this country" was replicated in the confusion of the call to arms as news of the War spread. Several reports of the variegated white constituency that assembled in Nairobi in August 1914, ready to volunteer, indicate the uncertainty among the pioneers surrounding the exact national and international alignments of the conflict. As one account details:

> They came in shorts, in breeches, in helmets, in Stetsons, in double *terais*, high-laced boots, in shoes or puttees, in leggings, in tunics, in khaki shirts open at the neck, displaying brawny chests. They arrived in buggies, on horseback, on muleback, on motor-cycles, motorcars of every make, kind and age, plus bicycles and ox wagons, by train and on foot. Great hefty giants from the Uashin Gishu Plateau, Dutchmen, tall blond Norwegians, Swedes, swarthy Italians, lean muscular British settlers all gravitated at the call.[26]

Once the battle lines were better established, many of these settlers would go on to enlist in the newly constituted East African Mounted Rifles. Their defensive task was not an easy one. By November of 1914 morale in the Protectorate was shattered, first by the Tanga disaster, when a 4000-strong British Indian Expeditionary Force was devastated in a disastrous attempt to attack the German coastal port, and second by depressing reports that Kitchener, the newly appointed Secretary of State for War, had described the East African territory as "strategically worthless." Already disenchanted with the cavalier attitude of their imperial government, the British settlers were now aggravated by the interference in the life of the colony by *parvenu* military bureaucrats fresh off the boat from England, with little knowledge of local resources or tribal protocol. And the War itself seemed to some former military combatants a bedraggled affair, often amounting to nothing more heroic than a few skirmishes around the railway line, with troops defeated by illness, thirst and exhaustion long before any encounter with enemy forces.[27]

For Berkeley Cole however, the conflict presented a timely opportunity to put both military horsemanship and local knowledge to good use. Together with Denys Finch Hatton, Berkeley travelled to the Protectorate's northern frontier to recruit a contingent of several hundred Somalis and some mules and set about patrolling a stretch of the railway line near Kilimanjaro.[28] This irregular platoon was initially a promising venture; the Somali horsemen were clever and resourceful trackers, able to survive on local game—guinea fowl, quail and francolin—and fearless in the face of danger. Accounts of the endeavour suggest that Berkeley was an excellent commander, assuming "the complete brisk cheerful carriage and expression of an efficient young officer," according to one commentator, and presiding over a disciplined unit which set up a well-organised camp on the racecourse at Nairobi.[29] The Somali troops were called into action on a number of occasions during 1915. Then, for reasons that remain unclear, they rebelled. Cole—almost killed in the course of the mutiny—was instead put in charge of a unit of Loyal North Lancashires, and these, merging with the few Somalis who remained with him, became known as Cole's Scouts. The unit worked closely with Masai guides and as a result moved effectively and quietly through the bush, using iodine to paint stripes on their horses to disguise them as zebras.[30] "My brother has just been in a red hot engagement on the German border in which we lost 50 killed and 200 wounded out of 800 engaged," wrote Galbraith Cole. "I am thankful to say he got through safely and only got some mules killed in his lot."[31] The unit was later disbanded and Cole transferred into the East African Mounted Rifles for the remainder of his war service.[32]

Inevitably, the conflict intensified pressure on the colony's resources, both material and human. Conscription for black and white civilians was introduced in March 1917. "It makes life very difficult at times," wrote

Karen Blixen, bereft of servants and farm labourers, “but of course it is good if it leads to an end of the crazy war out here.” With the War’s end the colony’s suffering continued, however, in the form of a devastating drought that stretched throughout May and June of 1918 and left many local tribes on the brink of famine. Blixen describes how Delamere shot zebra on his estate and sent the meat to Nairobi for the native children but it was little help against widespread malnutrition. Many settlers meanwhile fell victim to the rapacious Spanish influenza that spread in the wake of the War, and several white farms and businesses went bankrupt.[33]

After the War, the Cole brothers stayed on in the Protectorate and managed to restore their estates. In 1918 Galbraith Cole married Eleanor Balfour (a niece of the former Conservative Prime Minister and Chief Secretary for Ireland, Arthur Balfour) to whom he had been introduced two years earlier in Nairobi. Eleanor Cole’s recollections of her life in British East Africa describe their twelve years of happy marriage and the birth of two children but also the continued decline of Galbraith’s health. He became almost completely immobile and blind in one eye, suffering severe pain as a result of his arthritis. The family moved briefly to England but Galbraith complained that he felt as if he were in prison and that he wanted to die where he could “hear a zebra barking.”[34] The couple returned to Africa, leaving their sons behind at boarding school. In October 1929 Eleanor Cole loaded her husband’s revolver and then went for a walk, and Galbraith, assisted by his long-time servant Jama, shot himself. The colony’s well-known Irish doctor, Roland Burkitt, was sent for to confirm the death, and the next day, several friends arrived for the burial of Galbraith’s body near the house. A letter from Eleanor to John Cole gives an account of what had happened and includes a request that in the future her two children might spend their summers at Florence Court. “You can give them there what went to make G. and Berkeley, and which they can’t hope to get in any other way,” she wrote.[35] Eleanor Cole stayed on in British East Africa for the rest of her life, witnessing the volatile years of the Second World War and the Mau Mau rebellion and eventually, independence in 1963, when she was one of the first white settlers to take citizenship of the new Republic of Kenya.[36]

Berkeley Cole remained single (giving rise to rumours of Somali mistresses and a homosexual relationship with Finch Hatton) and seems to have interspersed occasional bouts of inebriated excess in Nairobi with long periods of seclusion at his isolated farm on the slopes of Mount Kenya. One visitor to his house at this time later described how he appeared "dressed for dinner in a pair of shrunken crepe drawers that failed to cover his naked legs, and a patched old jacket. A huge Russian bear-hound eats off our plates at will. Three sheep came in at luncheon and hens pecked around the table…."[37] It is through Karen Blixen's writing, however, that Berkeley comes into some kind of ideological focus in the context of the new colony's political constituency and with reference to his status as a scion of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy. Blixen depicts Cole as the last inheritor of aristocratic imperialism, set defensively against an encroaching middle-class settler culture in Nairobi. She locates him, together with his brother Galbraith, Delamere and Finch Hatton, within the "first wave" of white settlers in the country, a pioneer caste defined in *Shadows on the Grass* as the "Mayflower people," and characterised by a benevolent and selfless paternalism that validated the colonial project.[38]

Blixen was close to Berkeley and after her divorce from her Swedish husband, Baron Bror von Blixen-Finecke, talked of marrying him, less for love than for his "Honourable" title as the son of a peer, and his land. "I like him very much and enjoy being with him," she wrote to her brother in 1924, "and he is to get 150,000 acres in the north as a gift from the government—and that is always something."[39] Blixen fixed on the Cole brothers as embodiments of a refinement that was fast being eroded by Kenya's post-war push towards modern commercial development. In a letter to her mother, sent from her farm at Ngong in 1917, she wrote of the "fearful living death of the English middle class mediocrity" that had beset the colony. Those of the "old Settler Club" who had come out before the railway was built, she continued, maintained their distance from this *arriviste* cohort, living close to nature with the Masai and rarely venturing into town for the vulgar social pursuits held at venues such as Nairobi's Carleton hotel.[40] In Blixen's profile, Berkeley Cole and Denys Finch Hatton become the upholders of the Protectorate's feudal *ancien regime*. By the time of writing *Out of Africa* she had further romanticised the two men into exiles cast out from an unsympathetic homeland and destined to "wander here and there" as if in instinctual brotherhood with the nomadic Masai. They were charming, uncompromising and resilient. "Such types," she insisted, "were the natural leaders of native Africans."[41]

The idea of "natural" leadership exemplifies Blixen's rear-guard attempt throughout her writing to recruit Berkeley Cole to a broader justification of the European colonial project. This justification worked in tandem with a reiterated configuration of settler relations with the Masai, long regarded in white European perspectives as the aristocrats of the East African tribes.[42] Through their bonds with the Masai, a select caste of settlers—and Berkeley in particular—provides Blixen with a felicitous image of instinctual aristocratic leadership, influenced, one suspects, by her enthusiastic reading of W. B. Yeats in the period. "Berkeley … is one of the old 'Masai people', who have lived among the Masai thoroughly, and have a great interest in and a sympathy for this ill-fated race," she wrote to her mother.[43] The theme is picked up in *Out of Africa*. When Berkeley stayed on her farm, she recalled, "the Masai came over the river to see him. The old chiefs sat and discussed their troubles of the present time with him, his jokes would make them laugh, and it was as if a hard stone had laughed."[44] Politically, Cole was consistently active on behalf of the Masai—he had defended them passionately against War Office interference when the tribe rebelled in 1918, in violent reaction to an attempt at conscription. But the relationship as Blixen saw it was also richly symbolic and necessarily theatrical. After the War, Berkeley Cole was asked by the government to award medals to those Masai chiefs who had helped with intelligence on German troop movements, and Blixen describes the ceremony that took place in the gardens of her house at Ngong. The Masai waited on the lawn, she recalled, and Berkeley kept them waiting, which was in order. "When in the end he came forth from the house he looked, in this dark company, very fair, red-haired and light eyed. He stands upright, and they stand, speaks in Masai; both sides inscrutable." Despite the implicit comedy of a rather small Irish aristocrat attempting to pin medals on very tall men who were naked from the waist up, the account is reverential and solemn. "The ceremony could only have been carried through so well," Blixen concludes, "by two parties of noble blood and great family traditions; may democracy take no offence."[45]

Blixen's portrait of Berkeley Cole reflects what Donald Hannah refers to as the "schizophrenic" condition of Kenya in its formative years—a pervasive feudalism running alongside developed European farming patterns and a modern business enterprise mentality.[46] The Cole brothers can be seen to have spliced these two temporal states of existence. Berkeley's characteristic theatricality seems to have allowed him to play the role of a feudal lord, swathed in a blanket in the style of the Masai, and ordering champagne to be brought to him each morning in the woods on Blixen's farm.[47] Yet he was simultaneously a calculating colonial entrepreneur, swift to recognise the natural resources of his adopted land and to exploit them in a series of building schemes and agricultural ventures. He was also—much more than Galbraith—an active member of the colony's white administrative elite, not only in the bacchanalian environs of the Muthaiga Club but on the committees of Kenya's "Legco" or Legislative Council, where he intervened in several long-running issues and in particular, on what he saw as the continuing mismanagement of native tribal resettlement.[48]

Like his sister and brother, however, Berkeley lacked physical robustness. He died in 1925 of a heart attack (and not, as his cinematic fate suggests, of blackwater fever). His elegists seize upon his death as symbolic of a sea change in the history and culture of Kenya Colony. In *Forks and Hope*, Elspeth Huxley, who made a pilgrimage to see his overgrown and empty house on the slopes of Mount Kenya, sets him up as the last in a retinue of effervescent early settlers. "Berkeley Cole was one of the old, colonial Kenya's legends, impossible now to pin down," she recalled, "a man whose brilliant colours faded, when he died, like those of a tropical fish or a blue-and-orange lizard. He had fine looks, supple conversation, grey eyes and a gay Irish wit. He never made money, entered politics or took life too seriously."[49] Karen Blixen similarly positioned his death as a dividing line between the old and new versions of the country. "An epoch in the history of the colony came to an end with him," she writes in *Out of Africa*. "Up until his death the country had been the Happy Hunting Grounds, now it was slowly changing and turning into a business proposition."[50] The theme of an Irish aristocrat inheritance was sustained in the architecture of his memorial: both Berkeley and his brother Galbraith were commemorated by Irish round-tower style monuments, built to designs brought out from Enniskillen by John Cole, by now the fifth Earl.[51]

The transition from old to new Kenya had in fact been marked much earlier than the deaths of the two brothers in the 1920s. Even before the War, it was apparent that the keynote of white-settler imperialism had already shifted from what might be seen as an indirect, paternalist adventurism to a strategic commercial entrepreneurship. Along this same trajectory, economic and political interests were twinned in the ending of the British East African Protectorate at midnight on the 31st of December 1920, when Kenya was officially designated as a British Colony. Frequently at odds with London's foreign office bureaucrats, a large cohort of the white settlers—numbering around 10,000 in total—now began to press for self-government in the country, in aggrieved response to London's insistence on equal rights and representation for the Indian community. Under their slogan of resistance, "For King and Kenya," the white-settler "Vigilance Committee," as it styled itself, had Delamere and his colleagues reaching for analogies with 1912 and the mass signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant at the prospect of Irish Home Rule.[52] The conflict over the hierarchy of the new colony dominated the debates of Kenya's Legislative Council for years to come and in the end frustrated the early pioneer dream of a "white man's country," with aristocrat and Masai living undisturbed in quasi-feudal harmony.

Recent lines of thought in Irish political and imperial history have pushed for us "to know far more than we yet do" about the Irish presence in the elsewheres of the British Empire.[53] British East Africa is one of the less familiar "elsewheres" in this category. Many Irish men and women passed through or settled in the Protectorate in the years before 1920, but they lack visibility in Irish history, perhaps because their varied stories undermine a one-dimensional political narrative. The resources engaged in this account of the Coles show how such individuals are more readily recuperated through the anecdotal and biographical snapshots of literary memoir than through the collective architecture of colonial theory. This prismatic approach has its value, for while we might look for straightforward ideological parallels between an Ulster colonialist sensibility in early twentieth-century Ireland and the incentives of "frontier" communities across the Empire, such equations quickly become reductive. The Cole siblings are a case in point. Though they were willing participants in the high-watermark reach of British overseas expansion, the mixed motives and disparate fortunes of Enniskillen's three British East Africa expatriates, Florence, Galbraith and Berkeley, also suggest a maverick element that complicates this overview. Their lives speak eloquently to the play of irony and paradox surrounding the role of numerous Irish settler-colonials who were first dislocated by the realignments of the Boer War and then embedded in a global imperial hinterland, which, in turn, conditioned and shaped their perspective on Ireland's distant independence drama.

NOTES

1. Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1999), 7.
2. Enniskillen Papers (hereafter *EP*) at the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), D1702/9/7. I am grateful to the Deputy Keeper of the Records, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for permission to quote from these sources throughout this chapter.

3. For details of Enniskillen's commercial landscape in this period see Henry N. Lowe's *County Fermanagh One Hundred Years Ago: A Guide and Directory*, rev. ed. (1880; repr., Belfast: Friar's Bush Press, 1990).
4. *EP*, D1702/12/46/21–40 includes most of the 1901–1902 Boer War correspondence between the family members. Specific references above are from *EP* D1702/12/47, 11–20, Berkeley Cole to Charlotte Cole, 15 April 1901 and 28 June 1901. See also Elspeth Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 94–95.
5. Details from Charles Trevenix Trench, *The Men Who Ruled Kenya: The Kenya Administration 1892–1963* (London: Radcliffe Press, 1993), 135–37. Delamere's settlement in Africa is also covered in Elspeth Huxley's biography, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto, 1935, 1953).
6. "Court Circular," *Times*, 12 July 1899, 12.
7. *Country Life*, 15 December 1906, n.p.; *EP*, D1702/9/4; see also D1702/12/48/30 for Berkeley Cole's 35-page Masai vocabulary typescript.
8. Winston Churchill, *My African Journey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), see 3–7.
9. Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 93. Florence Cole also features in the aviator Beryl Markham's descriptions of her Kenyan adolescence in her 1942 memoir *West with the Night* (London: Virago, 1984).
10. See Charles Miller's *The Lunatic Express* (London: Macmillan, 1971) for a full account of the railway venture.
11. Trench gives some overview of these attempted relocations, *The Men who ruled Kenya*, 97–99.
12. See, for example, Eleanor Cole, *Random Recollections of a Pioneer Kenya Settler* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Random Publishing, 1975), 34–35.
13. Errol Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak: A Study of the Life of Denys Finch Hatton and His Relationship with Karen Blixen* (London: Grafton, 1985), 122. See also her similar endorsement of the Coles in *The Kenya Pioneers: The Frontiersmen of an Adopted Land* (London: Mandarin, 1991).
14. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 64. Cranworth's earlier (and tellingly entitled) account of this era, *A Colony in the Making, or, Sport and Profit in British East Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1912) is dedicated to Lord Delamere and Lady Florence Delamere (Cole).
15. Cited by Donald Hannah, *'Isak Dinesen' and Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality* (London: Putnam and Co., 1971), 35–36; see also Trzebinski, *Silence will Speak*, 127–28.
16. Much of this episode is described in his correspondence: see *EP* D1702/48/11, Galbraith Cole to Mrs Adrian Cave, 14 September 1914.

17. *The Letters of Llewelyn Powys*, ed. Louis Wilkinson (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), 86. See also Malcolm Ellis, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* (London: John Lane, 1946), chapter 7. *Ebony and Ivory*—containing some of Powys's "Diary of an African Sheep Farm"—was published in 1923.
18. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 6 and 131.
19. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 46.
20. The personal and business relationship between the two settlers is described by Sara Wheeler, *Too Close to the Sun: the Life and Times of Denys Finch Hatton* (London: Vintage, 2007).
21. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 83 and 87–88.
22. Donal Lowry, "Ulster Resistance and Loyalist Rebellion in the Empire," in *An Irish Empire: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Keith Jeffery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 191–215.
23. John Cole's war correspondence is mostly undated and subject to wartime censorship; for these references, see *EP* D1702/12/50/9, 50/10, 50/30.
24. Full demographics over the period are supplied by Keith Kyle, *The Politics of the Independence of Kenya* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).
25. Galbraith Cole to Mrs Adrian Cave, 9 March 1915, *EP* D1702/43/3.
26. A. Davies and H.G. Robinson, *Chronicles of Kenya* (1928), cited in Trzebinski, *Silence will Speak*, 164–65.
27. This period is charted by Charles Miller, *Battle for the Bundu* (London: Macdonald and James, 1974); see especially 90–97.
28. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 187–88.
29. Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak*, 165.
30. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 196.
31. Galbraith Cole to Mrs Adrian Cave, n.d., *EP* D1702/48/9; see also Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak*, 213–16.
32. Sara Wheeler discusses the Cole brothers in relation to Finch Hatton's wartime operations at this time in *Too Close to the Sun*, chapter 4.
33. See Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) to Ingeborg Dinesen, 31 March 1917; and 29 June 1928, in *Letters from Africa 1914–31*, ed. Frans Lasson (for the Rungstedlund Foundation; trans. Anne Born) (London: Picador, 1983), 43 and 73.
34. Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 102–3.
35. Eleanor Cole to John Cole, 6 November 1929, *EP* 1702/48/29. For details of Roland Wilks Burkitt, known locally as "Kill or Cure Burkitt," who arrived in the Protectorate in 1911, see Bernard Glemser, *The Long Safari* (London: Bodley Head, 1970), 22–25.
36. The remainder of Eleanor Cole's life is described in her autobiography, *Random Recollections*; see in particular, 102.
37. Lady Frances Scott, cited by Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 240.

38. Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), *Shadows on the Grass* (London: Penguin, 1984), 17. See also Judith Thurman, *Isak Dinesen, The Life of Karen Blixen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 114–15.
39. Isak Dinesen to Thomas Dinesen, 3 August 1924, in *Letters from Africa*, ed. Lasson, 223.
40. Isak Dinesen to Ingeborg Dinesen, 14 June 1917, in *Letters from Africa*, ed. Lasson, 49.
41. Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), *Out of Africa* (London: Penguin, 1989), 185.
42. Several influential studies of the Masai in this regard appeared from the establishment of the Protectorate onwards: see in particular A.C. Hollis, *The Masai: Their Language and Folklore* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), introduced by Sir Charles Eliot, Commissioner to British East Africa between 1900 and 1904.
43. Isak Dinesen to Ingeborg Dinesen, 1 June 1924, in *Letters from Africa*, ed. Lasson, 219.
44. Blixen, *Out of Africa*, 188.
45. Blixen, *Out of Africa*, 191.
46. Hannah, *"Isak Dinesen" and Karen Blixen*, 30.
47. Blixen, *Out of Africa*, 229–32.
48. There is some discussion of Berkeley Cole's activity on the Council in C.J. Duder and G.L. Simpson, "Land and Murder in Colonial Kenya," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25, no. 3 (1997): 440–65; 442. See also Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak*, 123.
49. Elspeth Huxley, *Forks and Hope: An African Notebook* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), 87.
50. Blixen, *Out of Africa*, 193.
51. See Eleanor Cole, *Random Recollections*, 57.
52. See Lowry, "Ulster Resistance," 198–99. The longer trajectory of settler agitation over Indian equal rights policy in Kenya is addressed by Christopher P. Youé, "The Threat of Settler Rebellion and the Imperial Predicament: The Denial of Indian rights in Kenya, 1923," *Canadian Journal of History* 12 (1978): 347–60.
53. Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xv.