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‘The lack of scientific liaison’: A.V. Hill and science research in Colonial India

ARCHIBALD VIVIAN HILL, the British Nobel Laureate in Physiology was actively enrolled in British employment of “science” as a tool for imagining a decolonised India during WWII. Hill first initiated a proposal for an “Empire Scientific Conference” in the Royal Society — UK’s national academy of science. After a series of meetings beginning in 1941, attended by representatives from India as well, the Royal Society first appointed a “British Commonwealth Science Committee” which recommended in 1943 that a meeting be held as soon as possible after the war. The conference began on June 17, 1946 — little more than a year before Indian independence. A debate in the British Parliament led to Hill’s deputation to India for a period of five months in order to survey scientific research establishments in India (1943). His trip resulted in the organisation of study trips for two groups, one of Indian scientists and another of industrialists to visit scientific and industrial research facilities in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada. This effort on part of the British government was a commitment made in times of post-war reconstruction and scarcity in Britain, motivated by the desire to build a post-imperial network where Britain would continue to have significance in the post-war world order — an effort in which Hill was enrolled and a willing participant. It is my intention to delineate imperial politics and science in the colonies through Hill’s efforts as cultural ambassador in a turbulent local and international context.

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