

In 1876, Leopold II, King of Belgium, had taken possession of Congo, more or less as his private property; it was handed over to the Belgian government in 1908. Britain's empire in Africa included Egypt and Sudan, Rhodesia, Uganda, British East Africa, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria, and South Africa. The French had taken possession of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, the Sahara, French Congo, French Guinea, Senegal, Dahomey and Madagascar. Germany had acquired German East Africa, South-West Africa, Cameroons and Togoland. The Italian conquests included Libya and Somaliland. Portugal held Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea, and Spain had acquired Rio de Oro and Spanish Guinea. Italy's ambition to conquer Ethiopia had been thwarted when her troops were defeated by the Ethiopian army at the famous Battle of Adowa in 1896. The details of colonial possessions in Asia and Africa in 1914 are shown in the maps of Asia and Africa included in this chapter. Japan's colonial expansion upto 1918 and colonial possessions in the Pacific up to 1914 are shown in separate maps.

The British empire was the biggest in the world, both in terms of the number of people over whom it ruled and the area under her rule. Britain, at this time, had a population of about 45 million but the population of her colonial possessions extending over an area of 23 million square kilometres was about 400 million. France with a population of about 39 million ruled over an empire of over 10 million square kilometres inhabited by over 50 million people.

Europe dominated the world not only politically but also economically. Three countries of Europe — Britain, Germany and France — controlled about 45 per cent of the world trade and about 60 per cent of the world market for manufactured goods.

The process of the imperialist conquest of Asia and Africa was accompanied by intense rivalries and conflicts among the European imperialist powers. The competing claims over colonies often created conditions of war. However, generally, most of these conflicts were resolved in the conference rooms of Europe and wars were avoided. The European powers settled their rival claims — which country would acquire which territory — on the basis of *quid pro quo* or 'something for something', by giving away something in exchange for receiving something. For example, in 1904, after a long period of conflicting claims, which had brought them almost to the point of war, Britain and France entered into a secret agreement whereby Britain was given a 'free hand' in Egypt and in exchange Morocco was to be given to France. When Germany came to know about it, she demanded that France relinquish her claim to Morocco. A series of international crises followed, bringing Europe to the brink of war. The Moroccan issue was finally settled in 1911 when France agreed to give a portion of French Congo to Germany and Germany informed France that she could do what she liked in Morocco. In creating these crises and in resolving them, the people of French Congo or Morocco, whose territories were being bargained, had no say.

In spite of the 'Gentlemen's Agreements' which resolved most disputes over colonies, there was growing militarization of the European states. Every country feared and suspected the other and tried to increase its military and naval strength and the size of every country's navy and army went on increasing. Most European countries introduced conscription, that is, making military training compulsory for everyone. Europe was being gradually converted into an armed camp. Each country, of course, claimed that the increase in her armed strength was for purely defence purposes but others' was for war. Britain opposed Germany building a