

Let us turn to the Englishwoman—the young Englishwoman—of 1897. She is educated. Whatever things are taught to the young man are taught to the young woman. If she wants to explore the wickedness of the world she can do so; for it is all in the books. The secrets of Nature are not closed to her; she can learn the structure of the body if she wishes. At school, at college, she studies just as the young man studies, but harder and with greater concentration. * * * She has invaded the professions. She cannot become a priest, because the Oriental prejudice against women still prevails, so that women in High Church places are not allowed to sing in the choir, or to play the organ, not to speak of preaching. * * * In the same way she cannot enter the Law. Some day she will get over this restriction, but not yet. For a long time she was kept out of medicine. That restriction is now removed; she can, and she does, practice as a physician or a surgeon, generally the former.³ I believe that she has shown in this profession, as in her university studies, she can stand, *inter pares*,⁴ among her equals and her peers, not her superiors. There is no branch of literature in which women have not distinguished themselves. * * *

In music they compose, but not greatly; they play and sing divinely. The acting of the best among them is equal to that of any living man. They have become journalists, in some cases of remarkable ability; in fact, there are thousands of women who now make their livelihood by writing in all its branches. As for the less common professions—the accountants, architects, actuaries, agents—they are rapidly being taken over by women.

It is no longer a question of necessity; women do not ask themselves whether they must earn their own bread, or live a life of dependence. Necessity or no necessity they demand work, with independence and personal liberty. Whether they will take upon them the duties and responsibilities of marriage, they postpone for further consideration. I believe that, although in the first eager running there are many who profess to despise marriage, the voice of nature and the instinctive yearning for love will prevail.

Personal independence: that is the keynote of the situation. Mothers no longer attempt the old control over their daughters; they would find it impossible. The girls go off by themselves on their bicycles; they go about as they please; they neither compromise themselves nor get talked about. For the first time in man's history it is regarded as a right and proper thing to trust a girl as a boy insists upon being trusted. Out of this personal freedom will come, I daresay, a change in the old feelings of young man to maiden. He will not see in her a frail, tender plant which must be protected from cold winds; she can protect herself perfectly well. He will not see in her any longer a creature of sweet emotions and pure aspirations, coupled with a complete ignorance of the world, because she already knows all that she wants to know. Nor will he see in her a companion whose mind is a blank, and whose conversation is insipid, because she already knows as much as he knows himself. Nor, again, will he see in her a housewife whose whole time will be occupied in superintending servants or in making, brewing, confecting things with her own hand.

1897

3. The first woman to have her name placed on the British Medical Register was Elizabeth Blackwell (who earned her degree in the United States), in 1859; it took another two decades for women to gain the right to study and take the required examinations in medicine in Great Britain.

4. Among equals (Latin). Modern bicycles (with wheels of equal size and pneumatic tires) began to be manufactured in the late 1880s and became extremely popular in Europe and the United States.

EMPIRE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Great Britain during Victoria's reign was not just a powerful island nation. It was the center of a global empire that brought the British into contact with a wide variety of other cultures, though the exchange was usually an unequal one. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly one-quarter of the earth's land surface was part of the British Empire, and more than four hundred million people were governed (however nominally) from Great Britain. Queen Victoria's far-flung empire was a truly heterogeneous entity, controlled by heterogeneous practices. It included Crown Colonies such as Jamaica, ruled from Britain, and protectorates such as Uganda, which had relinquished only partial sovereignty to Britain. Ireland was a kind of internal colony whose demands for home rule were alternately entertained and discouraged. India had started the century under the control of a private entity, the East India Company, but was ruled directly from Britain after the 1857 Indian Mutiny (the first war of Indian independence), and Victoria was crowned empress of India in 1877. Canada, with its substantial European population, had been virtually self-governing from the middle of the nineteenth century onward and was increasingly considered a near-equal partner in the imperial project. Australia enjoyed a parallel status, despite its inauspicious earlier history as the site of British penal colonies. By contrast, colonies and protectorates with large indigenous populations, such as Sierra Leone, or with large transplanted populations of ex-slaves and non-European laborers, such as Trinidad, would not gain autonomy until the twentieth century.

The scope of imperial enterprise at the close of the Victorian era is especially astounding given Britain's catastrophic loss of its American colonies (historians generally view the American Revolution of 1776 as marking the end of the first British Empire). But although empire was never a central preoccupation of the government during the first half of the nineteenth century, the second empire had continued to grow. Britain acquired a number of new territories, greatly expanded its colonies in Australia and Canada (which saw large-scale British emigration), and steadily pushed its way across the Indian subcontinent. A far more rapid expansion took place between 1870 and 1900, three decades that witnessed "the new imperialism"—a significantly different British mode of empire building that would continue until World War I (1914–18). Britain's rivalry with its European neighbors was an instrumental factor: the balance of power in Europe had shifted in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), leading to competition for new territories. Particularly fierce was "the scramble for Africa," as the partitioning of that continent was called. Expansion did not go unchallenged—the British fought both with indigenous peoples and with other European powers or settlers in numerous conflicts—but it progressed at an astonishing pace nonetheless.

To summarize Britain's attitude toward its imperial activities over the centuries is no easy task. The historian Sir John Seeley famously remarked in *The Expansion of England* (1883) that "we seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind," but many would now argue that economic motives were always present, and that Britain was driven to claim territories outside its national borders primarily by the urge to obtain raw materials such as sugar, spices, tea, tin, and rubber; to procure markets for its own goods; and to secure trade routes. From this perspective Britain's enhanced national pride in its expanding physical size, and thus ever-increasing political and military clout, was an important side effect of commercial growth but did not instigate its exploits overseas. To look at the British Empire in this way is to see it at its most naked, and to confront head-on the desire for financial profit that accompanied its arrival in, and occupation of, another land. As Marlow comments in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too

much." But Conrad's storyteller cannot leave it at that, adding, "What redeems it is the idea only." As we try to understand, if not redeem, the British Empire, we must investigate some of the principal ideas that collected around this huge and diverse phenomenon, and that underwent significant shifts over the decades of Victoria's reign.

Joseph Chamberlain asserts it: "The True Conception of Empire" (1897) that the balance sheet dictated what early-nineteenth-century Britons thought about their relationship with the colonies: having in the previous century "appeared rather in the light of a grasping and absentee landlord desiring to take from his tenants the utmost rents he could exact," Britain, shaken by its American losses, worried that some of its overseas enterprises would prove a financial drain. Yet India was another story, and by 1800 the importance to British prosperity of the trading opportunities in that continent was already viewed as axiomatic. In managing its businesses, however, the East India Company grew progressively more entangled with issues of Indian administration and politics; in its turn the British government became increasingly concerned with overseeing, and ultimately taking over, these functions. From this state of affairs a notion of trusteeship began to emerge—a belief that Britain had the responsibility to provide good government for the Indian people. Underlying this conviction was the assumption that Britain would thereby bestow the benefits of its culturally and morally superior civilization upon a lesser people (Thomas Babington Macaulay's confident pronouncements in his 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" evince this sentiment with particular succinctness). Evangelical Christianity played a contributory role as well, and not just through the missionaries who worked in India beginning in the early nineteenth century. More broadly, for the majority of Britons who believed that Protestantism was the one true faith, and that it was their religious duty to bring the potential for salvation to as many souls as possible, the imposition of British rule was divinely sanctioned. But there was still no widespread popular or governmental enthusiasm for the idea of imperialism as Britain's special destiny, and various factors, not least England's long and troubled relationship with Ireland, ensured that many viewed the project of colonial rule with suspicion throughout the middle years of the century. With the rise of the new imperialism, however, preexisting ideas about Britain's superiority, now bolstered by supposedly "scientific" theories supporting the notion of its evolutionary advancement, were channeled into a romantic vision of the British Empire as a tremendous force for the good not only of the residents of Great Britain or those overseas of traditionally "British" descent but of the whole world. In the last three decades of Victoria's rule (and well into the twentieth century), a large proportion of British people took pride simultaneously in the global supremacy of their empire and in what they perceived to be their generous and selfless willingness to pick up the thankless but necessary task of imperial rule ("the white man's burden," as Rudyard Kipling would call it in another context). Only if we appreciate just how genuinely many Britons believed that they and their country were performing a noble duty can we begin to make sense of the feelings of outrage and surprise and betrayal (often accompanied by virulent racism and vicious reprisals) that erupted when subjugated peoples periodically rose up against British control.

The British Empire had an incalculable physical and psychological impact on the individuals and cultures it colonized, but it also significantly changed the colonizers themselves, both at home and abroad. The need to concentrate on the imperial mission affected in theoretical and practical ways the consistency of a specifically British identity: the conflicted relations and characteristic differences between people from the various parts of the British Isles (politically dominant England and long-conquered Wales, Scotland, and Ireland) appeared less significant when set against the much more obvious inequities of power and greater cultural, racial, religious, and linguistic differences across the globe. A number of similar processes worked to solidify nationhood more generally. For instance, members of the working class in Great Britain only rarely connected their subordination to the English ruling class with that suffered by colonized peoples; they were much more likely to understand their identity

through those "ties of kindred, of religion, of history, and of language," as Chamberlain puts it, that bound them to other historically British citizens, however privileged. Intensified competition with the empire-building powers of continental Europe after the Franco-Prussian War also played an important role, as did the mounting stidency of other nationalist movements abroad. In the last quarter of the century, the patriotic fervor celebrating the achievements of the British nation as a whole increased dramatically—a phenomenon undoubtedly assisted by the growth both in the size of the reading public (literacy was practically universal in Britain by 1900, thanks to the progressive extension of elementary education) and in the number of flag-waving newspapers, periodicals, and books available for it to consume.

The citizens of Great Britain were thus welded into a more cohesive whole. But few of them were ready to accept the peoples of the colonies (and especially indigenous nonwhite populations) as truly "British," despite the inclusive rhetoric of empire (the "one imperial whole" that Alfred Lord Tennyson salutes in his poem on the opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition of 1886). Of course, there were exceptions: recounting his experiences on a visit to Britain for that same exhibition, the Indian T. N. Mukherji remembers that on one occasion in London, "somebody called me a foreigner. He is no foreigner!" cried several voices, "He is a British subject as you and I." To J. A. Hobson, the author of the influential *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), the importance of this casual affirmation of shared subjecthood was negligible, given that "not five per cent of the population of our Empire are possessed of any appreciable portion of the political and civil liberties which are the basis of British civilisation." Writing after Britain's imperial confidence had been severely damaged by the unanticipated length and difficulty of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902 in South Africa, Hobson in his meticulous analysis aimed not only to cast serious doubt on imperialism's putative financial benefit to Britain but also to demonstrate the overall falsity of the empire's claim to support the extension of self-government in its territories. In exposing the repeated misrepresentations and self-serving justifications at the heart of the British Empire, Hobson joined voices with others around the globe, such as the West Indian intellectual J. J. Thomas, and entered a tradition of anti-imperial critique that was to grow exponentially in the twentieth century.

It is instructive to consider the following discussions of Britain's relationship with other parts of the world, and its understanding of its own identity, in the context of a number of other selections. The popularity of Edward FitzGerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859) testifies to the Victorians' fascination with what they saw as the exotic appeal of distant cultures: Tennyson's poem "Locksley Hall" (1842) also reflects on "yonder shining Orient." Matthew Arnold's prose writings frequently address the issue of national character, while John Henry Newman sets forth an ideal of English manliness in his "definition of a gentleman" in *Discourse 8 of The Idea of a University* (1852). Versions of this ideal from the apex of Great Britain's period of national pride appear in two highly popular poems: W. E. Henley's "Invictus" (1888) and Kipling's "If" (1910); Kipling's other poems and his novella *The Man Who Would Be King* (1888) are also essential readings for those interested in the intensification of imperial enthusiasm at the end of Victoria's reign. At the same time we should heed the warning of the postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak against limiting any investigation of empire and national identity only to those writings that seem overtly concerned with the topic: "It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature," she insists at the beginning of an analysis of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), "without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English." In other words, images, explanations, and justifications of this massive enterprise were continually created and reflected throughout the pages of a wide range of Victorian texts.

For additional texts on the subject of empire, see "Victorian Imperialism" at Norton Literature Online.