THE WHITE MAN'S BURDENS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF BRITISH POETRY OF THE EMPIRE

EDITED BY
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'Take up the White Man's burden . . .'
RUDYARD KIPLING, 1898

'The White Man's Burden, Lord, is the burden of his cash'.
WILFRED SCAWEN BLUNT, 1899

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Punch

'"IN WAIN!"', 11 AUGUST 1877

Russia's growing influence in Afghanistan following success in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–8 appeared to threaten the security of British India. Populist imperialism, stirred up by parts of the press and exploited by Disraeli, urged action in a way that fell little short of advocating all-out war; despite this, a diplomatic solution was eventually reached. In this deft villanelle *Punch* uses the mock cockney of Dickens's character Betsy Prig, who speaks the poem, to parody war-mongering patriotism.

*A Villanelle of Vexations. By B***y P**g.*

In wain would I the British Lion wake!
  In wain I'd rouge the brute to wilent springing;
His tail won't wag, his mane declines to shake.

In wain my daily 'larum-bell I take,
  Till his ears tingle with its brazen ringing;
In wain would I the British Lion wake!

In wain I warn him of that Northern snake,
  Who midst our Injun grass will soon be stinging;
His tail won't wag, his mane declines to shake.

In wain to Gladstone I my gingham take,
  And spatter all his lot with free mud-flinging;
In wain would I the British Lion wake!

In wain I shriek out "Hinterests at stake!"
  Shout "Hup and at 'em! for the hours is winging!"
His tail won't wag, his mane declines to shake.

In wain are all the noisy pains I take,
  My fierce tongue-wagging and my sore hand-wringing,
In wain would I the British Lion wake!

He sleeps as placid as a windless lake;
  Cold water on my fire his calm is flinging.
His tail *won't* wag, his mane declines to shake;
In wain would I the British Lion wake!

Punch

'THE JINGO-ENGLISHMAN', 9 NOVEMBER 1878

The word 'jingo' was first used in 1878 to label a supporter of the blustering nationalism and imperialism that Disraeli was often accused of encouraging. *Punch* heartily disliked jingoism, which was offensive to its own sense of the higher moral purpose of empire. In this close parody of Eliza Cook's 'The Englishman', the bellicose rhetoric of the jingo is presented as a thin cover for greed and bullying.

There's a Land that's Cock of Creation's walk,
  Though it is but a tiny isle,
And to hear its brag, and its tall tall talk,
  Might make e'en *Bombastes* smile.
It holds itself holiest, first in fight,
  Most brave, most wise, most strong,
And will n'er admit what it fancies right
  Can by any chance be wrong.
'Tis the pink of perfection, deny it who can,
The Home of the Jingo Englishman!

There's a Flag that floats o'er every sea,
  And claims to control the brine;
And if any dare hint that it makes too free,
  The result is a deuce of a shine.
For the bouncing boys who walk the deck
  Deem the Ocean their own little lot,
And if foreign fools at their pride should check,
  They will catch it exceedingly hot.
Right-divine's in its bunting, deny it who can,
Is the Flag of the Jingo-Englishman!

Punch

'MIRAGE', 12 APRIL 1884

In the early 1880s the militant Islamic leader known as the Mahdi united the scattered tribes of the Sudan and inflicted a series of defeats upon the Egyptian army. Although the British at first refused to intervene, General Charles Gordon, a former Governor-General of the Sudan and already one of the Empire's favourite Christian warriors, was sent to evacuate the important Nile base of Khartoum, where he promptly found himself besieged and cut off. The imperial epic of Gordon of Khartoum then began, protracted by government indecision that fatally delayed the dispatch of a relief column. When the rescuers eventually arrived in the city in January 1885, they found that it had fallen to the Mahdi's forces only two days before. The death of Gordon was widely mourned and almost as widely versified. Here, in what is possibly the earliest poem in the whole saga, *Punch* imagines Gordon faithfully at his post awaiting rescue.

The Spring is round us with its budding green
  And brightening sun-shafts under English skies;
But 'tis not April shifts of shade and sheen
  That draw all English eyes.
Our thoughts are in the Desert, where there stands
  Alone, o'erlooking the unpeopled waste,
The scattered sun-bleached rocks and barren sands,
  One at whose cry a people's feet would haste.
That cry comes not,—so calm official lips
  With comfortable certainty protest;
  Yet fail to still the tumult of unrest
In many hearts; word-clouds will not eclipse
  The vision of that lonely watcher, lone
  'Midst alien hordes, on England's business gone;
Followed by England's eyes, and followed not
By England's arms! A wolfhound on the slot
  Held tight in leash, less eagerly looks out
After the unseen quarry, than we gaze,
Phrase-checked, through Policy's confusing haze
  Toward that watcher stout!

  What are his thoughts? His glance,
  Clear as the glitter of an Arab lance,
Cleaves the dim desert-haze. What does he see?
The vanguard of his country's chivalry?
  She was not wont to leave her bravest sons
With cool deliberate forecast to their doom;
Her rescuing onset not the dread simoom,
  Spear jungles, huge array of hostile guns,
Or mountain gorge, or black miasma-breath,
Would check; nay, nor the bodily menace of Pale Death
  With all his horsemen!
    True, no hot appeal
  Flashed through the wires for her avenging steel.
But since she knows him—and her honour, well,
  What need of that? *He* has no wish to point
All-marring Faction's calculated yell
  Of simulated horror, or unjoint
State-armour for his safety. Make *his* name
  A stalking-horse for the sham patriot troop
  Of mean place-hunters, who with howl and whoop
Pursue their quarry? 'Twere too great a shame!
  His life is but a light-held gift, to yield
  With cheery ease upon the stricken field,
Or at the gate of danger, where to stand
  Like that Pompeian sentinel, and die,
  Not called upon to strike, scorning to fly,
    Is duty simple, unexciting, grand
With a calm grandeur that's beyond the reach
Of furious strugglers in the perilous breach.
  Yet—yet—one man, much hampered, here as there,
  By Party shifts, by philanthropic prayer
Purblind in narrow zeal, 'midst ceaseless change
Of circumstance and policy whose range
  None can forecast, one man, and he not free,
  May need,—
    "*What* is it that I seem to see
Across the sand waste? Is it the quick gleam
Of English steel, or but a desert-dream?
  Help—or, that last illusion of distress,
  The mocking *Mirage* of the Wilderness?"

George MacDonald

'GENERAL GORDON', 1885

Now best remembered for his fantasy stories and children's fiction, particularly *At the Back of the North Wind*, MacDonald (1824–1905) also wrote a number of powerful novels, principally set in Scotland, and a substantial body of poetry. In these two sonnets on the death of Gordon, he contributes to the Victorian construction of Gordon as imperial martyr and Christian warrior.

I

VICTORIOUS through failure! faithful Lord,
Who for twelve angel legions wouldst not pray
From thine own country of eternal day,
To shield thee from the lanterned traitor horde,
Making thy one rash servant sheath his sword!—
Our long retarded legions, on their way,
Toiling through sands, and shouldering Nile's downsway,
To reach thy soldier, keeping at thy word,
Thou sawest foiled—but glorifiedst him,
Over ten cities giving him thy rule!
We will not mourn a star that grew not dim,
A soldier-child of God gone home from school!
A dregless cup, with life brimmed, he did quaff,
And quaffs it now with Christ's imperial staff!

II

ANOTHER to the witnesses' roll-call
Hath answered, "Here I am!" and so stept out—
With willingness crowned everywhere about,
Not the head only, but the body all,
In one great nimbus of obedient fall,
His heart's blood dashing in the face of doubt—
Love's last victorious stand amid the rout!
—Silence is left, and the untasted gall.
No chariot with ramping steeds of fire
The Father sent to fetch his man-child home;
His brother only called, "My Gordon, come!"
And like a dove to heaven he did aspire,
His one wing Death, his other, Heart's-desire.
—Farewell a while! we climb where thou has clomb!

Andrew Lang

'THE WHITE PACHA', 1885

Gordon's body was never found and for a time there was some speculation that he might have escaped from Khartoum. Lang's poem dismisses these hopes and, in an extraordinary and ominous analogy, aligns the dead Gordon with Arthur and Charlemagne, the warrior-heroes of vanished Christian empires.

VAIN is the dream! However Hope may rave,
He perished with the folk he could not save,
And though none surely told us he is dead,
And though perchance another in his stead,
Another, not less brave, when all was done,
Had fled unto the southward and the sun,
Had urged a way by force, or won by guile
To streams remotest of the secret Nile,
Had raised an army of the Desert men,
And, waiting for his hour, had turned again
And fallen on that False Prophet, yet we know
GORDON is dead, and these things are not so!
Nay, not for England's cause, nor to restore
Her trampled flag—for he loved Honour more—
Nay, not for Life, Revenge, or Victory,
Would he have fled, whose hour had dawned to die.
He will not come again, what'er our need,
He will not come, who is happy, being freed
From the deathly flesh, and perishable things,
And lies of statesmen, and rewards of kings.
Nay, somewhere by the sacred River's shore
He sleeps like those who shall return no more,
No more return for all the prayers of men—
Arthur and Charles—they never come again!
They shall not wake, though fair the vision seem:
Whate'er sick Hope may whisper, vain the dream!

Alfred Tennyson

'Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition by the Queen', 1886

According to the subtitle of the poem, Tennyson wrote it 'at the Request of the Prince of Wales', the future Edward VII; it was set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan. The exhibition was held at South Kensington in London, and its state opening on 4 May 1886—according to a contemporary source—was attended 'by delegates from one-fourth of the human race'. A glittering display of the achievements and products of the Empire, the exhibition was a huge success, visited by some five and a half million people.

Welcome, welcome with one voice!
In your welfare we rejoice,
Sons and brothers that have sent,
From isle and cape and continent,
Produce of your field and flood,
Mount and mine, and primal wood;
Works of subtle brain and hand,
And splendours of the morning land,
Gifts from every British zone;
Britons, hold your own!

May we find, as ages run,
The mother featured in the son;
And may yours for ever be
That old strength and constancy
Which has made your fathers great
In our ancient island State,
And wherever her flag fly,
Glorying between sea and sky,
Makes the might of Britain known;
Britons, hold your own!

Britain fought her sons of yore—
Britain failed; and never more,
Careless of our growing kin,
Shall we sin our fathers' sin,
Men that in a narrower day—
Unprophetic rulers they—
Drove from out the mother's nest
That young eagle of the West
To forage for herself alone;
Britons, hold your own!

Sharers of our glorious past,
Brothers, must we part at last?
Shall we not through good and ill
Cleave to one another still?
Britain's myriad voices call,
'Sons, be welded each and all,
Into one imperial whole,
One with Britain, heart and soul!
One life, one flag, one fleet, one Throne!'
Britons, hold your own!

William Ernest Henley

'PRO REGE NOSTRO', 1892

As well as being a poet whose early work, particularly *Hospital Verses* (1875), has considerable originality, Henley (1849–1903) was a leading literary editor and art critic, championing the then avant-garde work of Whistler and Rodin. He also held advanced imperialist, even jingoist, views, which he promoted through his editorship of the *National Observer*. This poem, often known as 'England, my England', was a particular favourite among public school patriots; it acquired its more elevated Latin title—'For Our Kingdom'—during the Boer War.

What have I done for you,
  England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
  England, my own?
With your glorious eyes austere,
As the Lord were walking near,
Whispering terrible things and dear
  As the Song on your bugles blown,
    England—
  Round the world on your bugles blown!

Where shall the watchful sun,
  England, my England,
Match the master-work you've done,
  England, my own?
When shall he rejoice agen
Such a breed of mighty men
As come forward, one to ten,
  To the Song on your bugles blown,
    England—
  Down the years on your bugles blown?

Ever the faith endures,
  England, my England:—
'Take and break us: we are yours,
  England, my own!
Life is good, and joy runs high
Between English earth and sky:
Death is death; but we shall die
  To the Song on your bugles blown,
    England—
  To the stars on your bugles blown!'

They call you proud and hard,
  England, my England:
You with worlds to watch and ward,
  England, my own!
You whose mailed hand keeps the keys
Of such teeming destinies,
You could know nor dread nor ease
  Were the Song on your bugles blown,
    England,
  Round the Pit on your bugles blown!

Mother of Ships whose might,
  England, my England,
Is the fierce old Sea's delight,
  England, my own,
Chosen daughter of the Lord,
Spouse-in-Chief of the ancient Sword,
There's the menace of the Word
  In the Song on your bugles blown,
    England—
  Out of heaven on your bugles blown!

Rudyard Kipling

'MANDALAY', 1892

From *Barrack Room Ballads*; an ex-soldier, caught in the tedium of working-class civilian life, remembers the exotic experience of colonial soldiering in the Far East. Mandalay, the Burmese capital, was occupied by British troops under General Prendergast in the Burma War of 1885; following the deposition of King Thebau, the whole country was annexed to the Empire.

By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' eastward to the sea,
There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me;
For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say:
"Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to
Mandalay!"
Come you back to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay:
Can't you 'ear their paddles chunkin' from Rangoon to
Mandalay?
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin'-fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost
the Bay!

'Er petticoat was yaller an' 'er little cap was green,
An' 'er name was Supi-yaw-lat—jes' the same as Theebaw's Queen,
An' I seed her first a-smokin' of a whackin' white cheroot,
An' a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot:
Bloomin' idol made o' mud—
Wot they called the Great Gawd Budd—
Plucky lot she cared for idols when I kissed 'er where
she stud!
On the road to Mandalay ...

When the mist was on the rice-fields an' the sun was droppin' slow,
She'd git 'er little banjo an' she'd sing "*Kulla-lo-lo!*"
With 'er arm upon my shoulder an' 'er cheek agin my cheek
We useter watch the steamers an' the *hathis* pilin' teak.
Elephints a-pilin' teak
In the sludgy, squdgy creek,
Where the silence 'ung that 'eavy you was 'arf afraid to
speak!
On the road to Mandalay ...

But that's all shove be'ind me—long ago an' fur away,
An' there ain't no 'busses runnin' from the Bank to Mandalay;
An' I'm learnin' 'ere in London what the ten-year soldier tells:
"If you've 'eard the East a-callin', you won't never 'eed naught
else."
No! you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells,
An' the sunshine an' the palm-trees an' the tinkly
temple-bells;
On the road to Mandalay ...

I am sick o' wastin' leather on these gritty pavin'-stones,
An' the blasted Henglish drizzle wakes the fever in my bones;
'Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids outer Chelsea to the Strand,
An' they talks a lot o' lovin', but wot do they understand?
Beefy face an' grubby 'and—
Law! wot do they understand?
I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land!
On the road to Mandalay ...

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there are n't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a
thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be—
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea;
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay,
With our sick beneath the awnings when we went to
Mandalay!
O the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin'-fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost
the Bay!

Rudyard Kipling

'Recessional', 1897

The sombre, monitory quality of Kipling's response to Victoria's Diamond Jubilee strikes a tellingly different note from the self-congratulatory celebration of monarchy and empire produced by many of his contemporaries.

God of our fathers, known of old,
  Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
  Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The tumult and the shouting dies;
  The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
  An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;
  On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
  Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
  Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
  Or lesser breeds without the Law—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust
  In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
  And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word—
Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!

Henry Newbolt

'Vitaï Lampada', 1898

Newbolt (1862–1938) was made famous by his poem 'Drake's Drum', first published in 1896 and then included in his first collection of verse, *Admirals All*, in 1897. Subsequent volumes, *The Island Race* of 1898 and *Songs of the Sea* of 1904, continued to promote patriotism, heroic history, and service to the Empire. The public school ethos provided the background to much of his liberal imperialism, as in this well-known celebration of schoolboy pluck on games field and battlefield, 'The Lamp of Life'.

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night—
  Ten to make and the match to win—
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
  An hour to play and the last man in.
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
  Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote—
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

The sand of the desert is sodden red,—
  Red with the wreck of a square that broke;
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,
  And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
  And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

This is the word that year by year,
  While in her place the School is set,
Every one of her sons must hear,
  And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with joyful mind
  Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And falling fling to the host behind—
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

He stood triumphant, and he seemed
Like one possessed or haunted.

With arms that welcome and rejoice,
We heard him gasping, in a voice
By strong emotion rendered harsh:
'That Marsh—that Admirable Marsh!'
The Tears of Avarice that rise
In purely visionary eyes
Were rolling down his nose.
He was no longer Blood the Bold,
The Terror of his foes;
But Blood inflamed with greed of gold.

He saw us, and at once became
The Blood we knew, the very same
Whom we had loved so long.
He looked affectionately sly,
And said, 'Perhaps you wonder why
My feelings are so strong?
You only see a swamp, but I—
My friends, I will explain it.
I know some gentlemen in town
Will give me fifty thousand down,
Merely for leave to drain it.'

A little later on we found
A piece of gently rolling ground
That showed above the flat.
Such a protuberance or rise
As wearies European eyes.
To common men, like Sin and me,
The Eminence appeared to be
As purposeless as that.
Blood saw another meaning there;
He turned with a portentous glare,
And shouted for the Native Name.
The Black interpreter in shame
Replied: 'The native name I fear
Is something signifying Mud.'
Then, with the gay bravado
That suits your jolly Pioneer,
In his prospectus Captain Blood
Baptized it 'Eldorado'.
He also said the Summit rose
Majestic with Eternal Snows.

Rudyard Kipling

'THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN', 1898

This (in)famous poem promoting the ideology of a white mission to civilize the world was addressed less perhaps to Britain and more to the United States, where Kipling lived for a number of years with his American wife. Significantly, though it outraged American liberals, the poem was enthusiastically received by Theodore Roosevelt and the large section of the population that supported him.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden—
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hope to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper—
  The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
  The roads ye shall not tread,
Go make them with your living,
  And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
  The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour
  (Ah, slowly!) toward the light:—
"Why brought ye us from bondage,
  "Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden—
  Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
  To cloak your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
  By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
  Shall weigh your Gods and you.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  Have done with childish days—
The lightly proffered laurel,
  The easy, ungrudged praise.
Comes now, to search your manhood
  Through all the thankless years,
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,
  The judgment of your peers!

Robert Williams Buchanan

From *THE NEW ROME: POEMS AND BALLADS OF OUR EMPIRE*, 1899

A novelist and dramatist as well as a poet, Buchanan (1841–1901) was a leading literary figure in London from the 1860s, his career including a notorious row with Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites, whom he derided in his essay 'The Fleshly School of Poetry'. Brought up as a socialist, Buchanan retained radical sympathies all his life, and these are nowhere more clear than in *The New Rome*, published as Britain was about to go to war in South Africa. The poems in the collection are loosely based on a parallel between the late Victorian British Empire and Rome in its decadence, and constitute an acerbic attack upon the military aggrandisement and commercial rapacity that Buchanan saw as the driving forces of imperial expansion.

'A SONG OF JUBILEE'

Here, ambiguity of tone and the demythologizing of British imperial history ironically invert the triumphalism and complacency that attended the celebration of Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Ho, heirs of Saxon Alfred
  And Cœur de Lion bold!
Mix'd breed of churls and belted earls
  Who worshipped God of old;
Who harried East and harried West
  And gather'd land and gold,
While from the lips of white-wing'd ships
  Our battle-thunder rolled!
With a hey! and a ho!
  And a British three times three!
At the will of the Lord of the Cross and Sword
  We swept from sea to sea!

Algernon Charles Swinburne

'TRANSVAAL', 1899

The patriotic and imperialist themes in much of the verse Swinburne (1837–1909) produced towards the end of his life offer a marked contrast to the lush eroticism and the vehement republican and atheist sentiments that characerized the poetry that made him famous—or infamous—in the 1860s and 1870s. Swinburne himself saw no inconsistency, however, and frequently invoked the Cromwellian Commonwealth as a model and inspiration for the Victorian Empire, as in this typically violent sonnet written at the start of the Boer War.

Patience, long sick to death, is dead. Too long
Have sloth and doubt and treason bidden us be
What Cromwell's England was not, when the sea
To him bore witness given of Blake how strong
She stood, a commonweal that brooked no wrong
From foes less vile than men like wolves set free
Whose war is waged where none may fight or flee—
With women and with weanlings. Speech and song
Lack utterance now for loathing. Scarce we hear
Foul tongues that blacken God's dishonoured name
With prayers turned curses and with praise found shame
Defy the truth whose witness now draws near
To scourge these dogs, agape with jaws afoam,
Down out of life. Strike, England, and strike home.

Wilfred Scawen Blunt

From *SATAN ABSOLVED. A VICTORIAN MYSTERY*, 1899

Satan Absolved is an extraordinary poem, an appalled, apocalyptic vision of the devastation wrought by the Western nations, and Britain in particular, in the pursuit of empire. In the following extract, Satan, witheringly dismissive of the ideology of The White Man's Burden, tells God that the Anglo-Saxon races have pillaged the earth in the name of Christianity, and The Angel of Pity catalogues the destruction of the natural world at the hands of white imperialists.

Nay, they have tarred Time's features, pock-marked Nature's face,
Brought all to the same jakes with their own lack of grace.
In all Thy living World there is no sentient thing
Polluteth and defileth as this Saxon king,
This intellectual lord and sage of the new quest,
The only wanton he that fouleth his own nest.
And still his boast goeth forth. Nay, Lord, 'tis shame to Thee
This slave, being what he is, should ape divinity,
The poorest saddest drudge, the least joy-lifted heart
In all a World where tears are sold in open mart,
That he should stand, Thy choice, to preach Thy law, and set
His impress on the Earth in full apostolate,
Thy missioner and priest. He goeth among the nations,
Saith he, to spread Thy truth, to preach Thy law of patience,
To glorify Thy name! Not selfishly, forsooth,
But for their own more good, to open them the truth,
To teach them happiness, to civilise, to save,
To smite down the oppressor and make free the slave.
To bear the "White Man's Burden," which he yearns to take
On his white Saxon back for his white conscience' sake.
Huge impudent imposture!—Lord, there were fair lands
Once on Thy Earth, brave hills, bright isles, sweet coral strands,
Noble savannahs, plains of limitless waving green,
Lakes girt with giant forests, continents unseen,
Unknown by these white thieves, where men lived in the way
Of Thy good natural law with Thy free beasts at play. . . .

As not the sunset hath, such purples as no throne,
Not even in heaven, showeth (hardly, Lord, Thine own),
Such azures as the sea's, such greens as are in Spring
The oak trees' tenderest buds of watched-for blossoming,
Such opalescent pearls as only in thy skies
The lunar bow revealeth to night's sleep-tired eyes.
Behold them, Lord of Beauty, Lord of Reverence,
Lord of Compassion, Thou who metest means to ends,
Nor madest Thy world fair for less than Thine own fame,
Behold Thy birds of joy lost, tortured, put to shame
For these vile strumpets' whim! Arise, or cease to be
Judge of the quick and dead! These dead wings cry to Thee!
Arise, Lord, and avenge!

Punch

'THE TOURIST AND THE FLAG', 18 APRIL 1900

A wry reflection on the much-vaunted relationship between commercial prosperity and the imperial flag. Thomas Cook, the travel agents, had just announced tours of the Boer War battlefields.

O FLAG! whose benefits so fair
We would with others freely share—
Aye, forcing on reluctant nations,
At bayonet point, their own salvations,
And bidding them accept our mission
On pain of instant demolition—
O flag! howe'er they disagree,
The sages that have studied thee,
Alleging, these, that trade must grow
Beneath thy folds; while those say, "No.
That is a most mistaken view:
There's no connection 'twixt the two."
O flag! however this may be,
And whether trade doth follow thee,
I know not, I; but this is true,
Beyond all question tourists do.
No matter where thou art unfurled,
In whatso region of the world,
They swarm, they flock, and Messrs. COOK
Interminable tourists book
To Eland's Laagte, Bloemfontein,
(Where passengers may stop to dine
Before proceeding on their way
To further north Pretoria).
In myriads behold they come,
And almost ere the guns are dumb,
The picknickers' champagne will pop
Upon the plains of Spion Kop.
O flag! O tourist! Powers twain
That all the world resists in vain,
When 'neath the one the other picks
The wings and legs of festive chicks,
And strews the battlefield with bones,
Newspapers, orange peel, plum stones—
Then is the reign of darkness done,
And Freedom's fight is fought and won.

William Ernest Henley

'LAST POST', 1900

Published in Henley's enthusiastically pro-Boer War collection *For England's Sake*, this elegy for the nation's dead goes beyond his normal martial fervour to see the conflict as one stage in the establishment of English racial ascendancy. It was set to music for chorus and orchestra by Charles Villiers Stanford.

The day's high work is over and done,
And these no more will need the sun:
Blow, you bugles of England, blow!
These are gone whither all must go,
Mightily gone from the field they won.
So in the workaday wear of battle,
Touched to glory with God's own red,
Bear we our chosen to their bed.
Settle them lovingly where they fell,
In that good lap they loved so well;
And, their deliveries to the dear Lord said,
And the last desperate volleys ranged and sped,
Blow, you bugles of England, blow
Over the camps of her beaten foe—
Blow glory and pity to the victor Mother,
Sad, O, sad in her sacrificial dead!
Labour, and love, and strife, and mirth,
They gave their part in this goodly Earth—
Blow, you bugles of England, blow!—
That her Name as a sun among stars might glow,
Till the dusk of Time, with honour and worth:
That, stung by the lust and the pain of battle
The One Race ever might starkly spread
And the One Flag eagle it overhead!
In a rapture of wrath and faith and pride,
Thus they felt it, and thus they died;
So to the Maker of homes, to the Giver of bread,
For whose dear sake their triumphing souls they shed,
Blow, you bugles of England, blow
Though you break the heart of her beaten foe,
Glory and praise to the everlasting Mother,
Glory and peace to her lovely and faithful dead!

Henry Newbolt

'APRIL ON WAGGON HILL', written 1900

Waggon Hill was a key position in the defence of Ladysmith during the Boer War. In January 1900 a desperately fought action in which the Devonshire Regiment was prominent eventually prevented the Boer forces besieging the town from capturing the hill. In this elegiac poem, the tone of which owes much to Housman, Newbolt addresses a Devon soldier killed in the battle.

Lad, and can you rest now,
  There beneath your hill!
Your hands are on your breast now
  But is your heart so still?
'Twas the right death to die, lad,
  A gift without regret,
But unless truth's a lie, lad,
  You dream of Devon yet.

Ay, ay, the year's awaking,
  The fire's among the ling,
The beechen hedge is breaking,
  The curlew's on the wing;
Primroses are out, lad,
  On the high banks of Lee,
And the sun stirs the trout, lad,
  From Brendon to the sea.

I know what's in your heart, lad,—
  The mare he used to hunt—
And her blue market-cart, lad,
  With posies tied in front—
We miss them from the moor road,
  They're getting old to roam,
The road they're on's a sure road
  And nearer, lad, to home.

Your name, the name they cherish?
  'Twill fade, lad, 'tis true:
But stone and all may perish
  With little loss to you.
While fame's fame you're Devon, lad,
  The Glory of the West;
Till the roll's called in heaven, lad,
  You may well take your rest.

Henry Newbolt

'THE ONLY SON', written *c.*1900

Although the aristocratic and patriarchal England invoked by this poem about a soldier killed in South Africa is standard in Newbolt's work, the emphasis it gives to intense maternal loss strikes a more unfamiliar note.

O BITTER wind toward the sunset blowing,
  What of the dales to-night?
In yonder gray old hall what fires are glowing,
  What ring of festal light?

"In the great window as the day was dwindling
  I saw an old man stand;
His head was proudly held and his eyes kindling,
  But the list shook in his hand."

O wind of twilight, was there no word uttered,
  No sound of joy or wail?
"'A great fight and a good death,' he muttered;
  'Trust him, he would not fail.'"

What of the chamber dark where she was lying
  For whom all life is done?
"Within her heart she rocks a dead child, crying
  'My son, my little son.'"