The ‘Meaning of Empire Day’: Imperial Citizenship and Youth in Edwardian England

by

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Introduction

On a sunless, dull and drizzle-filled afternoon on May 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1904 an assorted collection of working-class children and parents, charity workers, and MPs crowded into St. James Hall in central London. The occasion was “Empire Day,” the date was the birthday of the late Queen Victoria – the monarch under whose reign the contemporary empire had taken form – and the reason was to instill imperial patriotism into the hearts and minds of the youth. The gathered people sang songs exalting the empire and a few of the more prominent individuals gave speeches emphasizing every Briton’s duties towards it. The entire ceremony, lasting less than two hours, concluded with a formal salute of the Union Jack and a stirring rendition of the National Anthem.\textsuperscript{1} However, the organizer of the event, Reginald Brabazon, the 12\textsuperscript{th} Earl of Meath, was determined that this Empire Day would not be just a one-time occurrence. Accordingly, he devoted the next decade to promoting the holiday not just within the British Isles, but throughout the entire empire.

The idea of the holiday immediately resonated with the British public. So much so, that in the following years a wide range of educators, newspaper editors, imperialists, municipal authorities and all kinds of Britons were inspired to organize their own Empire Day celebrations for children. Indeed, Empire Day demonstrations, both in individual schools and in much larger ceremonies in parks or soccer stadiums, became so prevalent that by 1909 \textit{The Times}, one of the most circulated newspapers in Great Britain, reported that it had undoubtedly become “a festival of national importance.”\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{The Times}, 25 May 1904, 4.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 25 May 1909, 13.
Since the holiday was intended first and foremost for children, one of the main places that it was expressed was in the school auditoriums and playgrounds. During a typical school ceremony in its initial years, children would listen to lectures about the history of the empire, sing rousing songs, salute the flag, and often receive some kind of candy. In many cases the children took part in drills, dances, dialogues, or other forms of pageantry. Most important of the teachers granted them a half-holiday from school.\(^3\) It became so widespread that by 1919, three years after its official recognition in Parliament, the holiday was recognized by 27,323 schools within Great Britain, with only three English and two Welsh local education authorities (out of well over one hundred) refusing to recognize it.\(^4\)

The celebration was not confined to the schools, however. Each year, an increasing number of municipal bodies and imperial interest groups organized public spectacles, i.e., concerts, parades and other public gatherings. Starting in 1909, the most popular pageant was the Hyde Park Empire Day parade which took place in London on the closest Saturday to May 24\(^{th}\). It was so successful that by 1911, supposedly 200,000 people were in attendance.\(^5\) Compare the following description from the *The Times* of the Hyde Park parade in 1911 with the inaugural ceremony aforementioned:

> The spectacle in Hyde Park on Saturday was one to kindle the dullest imagination and stir the most sluggish heart. From all parts of London procession after procession had marched to the Park, with bands playing and banners flying to salute the Union Jack, till nearly 10,000 boys and girls were concentrated in a great

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\(^3\) A popular children’s rhyme from that time went “Empire Day, Empire Day,/If you don’t give us a holiday/We’ll all run away.” This short rhyme emphasizes the importance children most likely attached to the time away from school the holiday granted to them. Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 263.

\(^4\) Andrew S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 118.

\(^5\) *The Times*, 29 May 1911, 4.
quadrangular space just inside Grosvenor-gate, taking up the positions marked out for them in columns each about 1,000 strong.\textsuperscript{6}

This massive and rapid growth demonstrates that that the idea for an Empire Day promoted by Lord Meath found a very eager and willing audience in the British public. Furthermore, if one considers such participatory acts as hanging flags or attending a parade, then it is safe to assume that millions of Britons were involved with the celebration of Empire Day. Oral recollections and newspaper reports suggest that the holiday remained a fixture of the British calendar until the Second World War. However, as the empire dissolved, so did the desire to have a holiday devoted specifically to it. By 1958, it was renamed “Commonwealth Day” and moved to the second Monday in March; since then, it has remained a holiday in name only.\textsuperscript{7}

In contrast to Empire Day’s contemporary popularity in Britain, the holiday has received rather limited attention by historians. This is especially true during the holiday’s formative years as it spread across the towns and schools in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{8} Almost all the attention has come from Studies in Imperialism, a series of works devoted to assessing the impact of the empire on Britain’s culture in the 19th and 20th century. According to John Mackenzie, the general editor, the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{7} There has been no comprehensive study of Empire Day in its waning years. John Mackenzie notes that in the immediate years following the World War II there was a renewed amount of interest in the holiday, but it quickly evaporated by 1951. By the middle of the 1950s, there was practically no mention of it in the newspaper. It continued to peter out and was official dismantled in 1958. John M. Mackenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 236.
\end{itemize}
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guiding belief of this school is that imperialism was a significant cultural phenomenon at this time within both dominant and subordinate societies in Great Britain. Naturally, a few of these historians of “popular imperialism” have included the immensely popular Empire Day in their works. However, such studies have treated the holiday primarily as an attempt by the imperialist caste, exemplified by Lord Meath, to engage a previously uninvolved working class through education and imperial pageantry with the imperial enterprise. As one such historian noted, the prime objective of Empire Day “was to instill in the rising generation pride in an achievement which had painted so much of the world map red.”

Although these broad conclusions are sound, there still exist two major critiques of the previous studies of Empire Day. First, the members of the “popular imperialism” school primarily view the propagation of the holiday as the result of a handful of determined imperialist propagandists. Consequently, Lord Meath, and not the British public who actually celebrated the holiday, has been the focus of previous historical inquiries into Empire Day. In these works, Lord Meath and his Empire Day Movement are the sole proponent and thus sole impetus for the holiday. Accordingly, the celebration of Empire Day becomes an expression of his own specific moral and social doctrine that he grafted onto the British public. The second problem, and related to the above, is that these historians treated the meaning of the holiday as monolithic; the imperialist caste

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9 The first of these works is by John Mackenzie, Propaganda and Empire.
10 Although the work by Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire” pre-dates the Studies in Imperialism, the same critique can apply. However, the exception to this is a chapter by Anne Bloomfield which analyzes Empire Day and other public ceremonies in Edwardian Nottingham. Anne Bloomfield, “Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism,” in Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).
wished to transmit its attachment to the empire to the rising generation through a school holiday. Unfortunately, this approach does not analyze or deconstruct the various manifestations, symbols and myths used in the propagation of Empire Day. Indeed, in treating the holiday and symbols as self-evident, these historians have failed to reconcile the sentiments of the imperialists on Empire Day with the domestic social concerns out of which they arose in Edwardian Britain.

In response, this thesis will examine the various manifestations of Empire Day during the Edwardian Era in much greater depth than has been previously treated by historians. To begin with, far from being a day for the propagation of individual or state propaganda – for Parliament did not even recognize the holiday until 1916 – the spread of Empire Day should also be attributed to grass-roots organization. What made the widespread celebration of Empire Day possible was not only the tireless effort of Lord Meath, but rather the voluntary participation of various newspapers, consenting local educational authorities and other interest groups.\textsuperscript{13} Accordingly, this thesis will treat the holiday as a social phenomenon with multiple sites of expression, each with its own intentions and reasons for participating that may or may not be identical to the ideology of Lord Meath. In doing so, this thesis will examine Empire Day through an analysis of the event itself and not just its most popular proponents. Furthermore, it will connect the rhetoric of the holiday and the symbols being used to the sociopolitical milieu out of which they arose. This contextualized perspective will allow one to gain a fuller understanding of the cultural and social significance of the holiday.

In looking at the symbols, rituals and myths, this thesis deals primarily with – to use an economic metaphor – the "supply side" of this imperial ideology.

\textsuperscript{13} Although Andrew Thompson notes this trend, he only devotes a total eight paragraphs to the holiday in his work. Thompson, The Empire Strikes Back?, 118-9.
In other words, what will primarily be examined is the rhetoric and message behind Empire Day; more specifically, the national-imperial identity and ethos that educators and imperialists tried to impart to children. As a result, I will not focus on how the message was actually received by the “consumers,” i.e., the children. The sources this thesis utilized reflect and reinforce this approach. I have relied on the literature produced by the founder of the holiday, periodicals, parliamentary debates, and most importantly, newspapers reports on the various celebrations Also, I looked at newspaper coverage from both conservative and liberal newspapers in greater depth than previous studies. This allowed me to assess not only the rhetoric of Lord Meath on Empire Day, but also and more importantly, what the myriad of other Britons were doing and saying on this imperial holiday. Moreover, this thesis is the first work which gives close attention to contents of the various poems, symbols, songs, plays and the rituals that comprised Empire Day.

The first chapter will examine the foundation of the holiday and the ideology of its original proponents, Lord Meath and his Empire Day Movement (EDM). Although this would seem to suggest that the first chapter is following the studies on Meath that had come before, it is distinct in several ways. For one, it examines the specifics of the doctrine of the EDM in relation to the sociopolitical

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context out of which it arose. Unlike the previous works, this chapter will not merely assess what Lord Meath was saying, but *why* he was saying it.

As will be shown, by the advent of the 20th century, many Edwardians were well aware that Britain’s global hegemony was rapidly fading, if not already gone. In placing Lord Meath in this proper historical situation he becomes more than just a propagandizing imperialist, but also a representative of how conservative Edwardians responded to the dilemmas that they faced. What he and many others wished to see was a moral regeneration of the British populace, one that would revitalize the Weary Titan. This was to be accomplished by training the children in the lessons of good citizenship. Furthermore, the thesis will proceed to show that Lord Meath’s version of the holiday exemplified just one approach of which certain aspects, but not all, were shared by many.

While the first chapter explores *why* the proponents of Empire Day wished to see the British child receive a moral training, the second chapter will provide a more detailed analysis of *how* this translated to reality in schools. Throughout schools on Empire Day, the aim of educators was for children to learn their responsibility and duty to their empire. However, the actual focus of the weighty rhetoric was obedience and utility in one’s local sphere. In other words, duty and responsibility to the empire was in reality “paying your taxes” or keeping clean. As a result, the celebration of Empire Day will be seen in conjunction with the continual process of socializing children that occurred throughout the school year. However, the question remains how such an ephemeral event intended to make children want to be good citizens year round. Accordingly, imperial patriotism – defined in this thesis as pride in the nation-state and its empire – was utilized by educators as the motivational force which would induce children to perform the
aforementioned specific normative behaviors. In other words, the Union Jack, patriotic songs, history lessons about empire-builders, and other related activities all worked together to inspire children to uphold their “imperial” citizenship.

In creating this patriotic identity, educators and imperialists placed the needs of nation-state over the well-being individual. In accordance, such traits as self-sacrifice and discipline to the state were widely promoted not just by Lord Meath, but by many parts of mainstream society. The third chapter will analyze the martial spirit on Empire Day and its militaristic as well as “unmilitaristic” expressions. Such manifestations as rifle-shooting competitions and the parades of uniformed children represent a distinct integration of civil society with military ideals during this time. At the same time, there were many in Great Britain who were downright fearful of the effect of the jingo and militant spirit which so commonly accompanied any holiday celebrating the “world’s greatest empire.” Furthermore, many of the expressions had a real sense of carnival and thereby any kind of militant or militaristic character was absent. Thus, this chapter aims to further expound how Empire Day was not a uniform expression of British patriotism.

The final chapter will offer the first in depth look at resistance at the holiday in the Edwardian period. One historian currently writing his PhD dissertation on the holiday in Britain has noted that criticism of Empire Day before the First World War was “marginal and inchoate” because the protean nature of the holiday enabled it to be seamlessly absorbed into the social order. Although the Empire Day was protean in nature, resistance was by no means

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“inchoate”; in fact, the same reasons for protesting the holiday continued into the interwar years.

As much as Lord Meath wished to assert its apolitical nature, the holiday was subjected to many of the same political divisions that faced the empire. To socialists, laborites and those with a precocious sense of humanitarianism, imperialism and the empire it created implied oppression and conquest. In turn, a holiday celebrating the British Empire was not merely distasteful, but contradictory to the ideology they aimed to promote. However, the less radical groups were not opposed to the empire per se, but rather to the character and nature of the empire. Many liberal MPs and educational authorities resented the jingoistic form that Empire Day could so easily adopt. The tensions created by the holiday are best exemplified by the Parliamentary debates of that period. Accordingly, the fourth chapter will end with an examination of the MPs’ view of the holiday in order to overtly examine the politics of the representations of empire which otherwise has been mostly implied throughout the thesis.

The Parameters: England in 1904-1914

Even since the “linguistic turn” undercut many of the assumed pillars of the discipline of history, certain fundamental guidelines still apply if one wishes to develop an effective work of inquiry. First, without geopolitical parameters one’s work would dissolve into an amorphous study which would inherently be so general as to inhibit specific conclusions. Empire Day was celebrated throughout the empire and each territory, dominion, principality, etc., had a differing relationship to the imperial enterprise. As a result, an Australian participating in “Empire Day” means something completely different than to an Indian child or an English child. I recognize that many other factors decide a person’s identity
besides nationality, but in this work which studies patriotism, it is necessary to
determine which nation-state or collection of states towards which the pride will
be directed. Furthermore, the fact that Great Britain was the “heart” of the empire
is inextricable from the imperial patriotism on Empire Day. This study will focus
on those individuals who saw themselves as the “rulers” of their domain.

More specifically, the geographical boundaries on this thesis are England,
since all the evidence reporting the holiday comes from within this country. As a
result, all the conclusions made in this thesis will refer to education, identity and
militarism in England. At the same time, the political context is provided by Great
Britain. Given that England was politically united with Wales and Scotland for
hundreds of years, it becomes impossible to treat England as a separate political
and cultural unit. Therefore, when I mention the term British, e.g., British
greatness, this does not exclude, but rather subsumes Englishness. This is
primarily because on Empire Day, identity was defined by race (“Anglo-Saxon”),
language (English), and an allegiance to the British state (King Edward VII). As a
result, imperial patriotism cut across Scottish, Welsh, Irish or English nationalism.
This is why Lord Rosebery, a Scottish Liberal Imperialist who was Prime Minister
in 1895, was able to give a speech in Edinburgh to Scottish children about the
meaning of the Union Jack while the London County Council could circulate it in
English schools on Empire Day. Most notable of all, the founder of the holiday in
England, Lord Meath was Irish, although born and educated in England.

The second parameter of this thesis is its timeframe. The examination
begins with the foundation of Empire Day; determining the timing of an historical

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17 Given the Irish’s much more tenuous and tumultuous history with their Anglo-Saxon
counterpart, the presence of Empire Day means a markedly different thing. See David H. Hume
and the British Empire (Manchester, 1996), pp. 149-67 for a more detailed analysis.
event is an integral part of coming to a fuller understanding why it occurred. It ends in May 1914, three months before the outbreak of World War I.\textsuperscript{18} This study, like hundreds of works that have came before it, cannot overcome the momentous impact that the First World War had on the world. “The War to end war” did not necessarily live up to its name, but the profundity of the effects of mechanized war and mass death on a society revolutionized the values and paradigms of society. Accordingly, since the context of the holiday changed so dramatically, so would the validity of any pre-war conclusion.

This is not to say that Empire Day of the 1920s is completely different than its pre-war counterparts; in many ways they were similar. The ideals of imperial unity and of moral strength which revolved around British greatness still remained. Nonetheless, a basic assumption of this thesis is that Empire Day reflected the concerns, topical dilemmas and trends of its time. For example, in the 1900s and 1910s, the holiday was replete with military drills and shooting competitions for young cadets; by the 1920s, the same holiday had transformed to serve as a commemoration for those aforementioned young cadets who had gone on to experience during WWI the futility of such exercises. As one historian notes, “after 1918, a distinct shift in emphasis occurred whereby the celebration of Empire Day that involved colour, flag waving, and festivities was replaced by one that, as its centerpiece, enacted somber rituals of remembrance.”\textsuperscript{19} Thus, as it will be shown, the meaning of the holiday ultimately derives from its sociopolitical context, which in this thesis remains rooted in the society of Edwardian England.

\textsuperscript{18} The qualifier “Edwardian” implies the time in British history between the death of Queen Victoria (1901) and the beginning of the First World War. King Edward VII ruled from 1901-1910, but the Edwardian period has traditionally been extended to include up until 1914.

\textsuperscript{19} English, “Empire Day in Britain: 1904-1958”, 261.
Chapter One
The Origins of Empire Day: Its Ideological Antecedents and Sociopolitical Context

This chapter will examine how Lord Meath, the founder of the Empire Day Movement, attempted to use Empire Day as a conduit to inject “a coherent social and moral doctrine” – founded on discipline and inspired by patriotism – to the children of Great Britain.20 It must be noted, however, that this obsession with citizenship, empire, and patriotism was shared by many. From a view of the contemporaneous imperial literature, e.g, the speeches of the prominent imperialist Lord Curzon and the popular children’s readers, it appears that the tropes of obedience, responsibility and self-sacrifice so readily adopted as the watchwords of the Empire Day Movement reflect the dominant imperialist ethos during the Edwardian period. Thus, Lord Meath should be understood as representative of the social and political attitudes held by the more conservative and (militaristic) imperialists.21 However, to understand why Empire Day was founded and given its specific character one must gain a more contextualized perspective as reflected in the sociopolitical milieu of Edwardian Britain at the advent of the 20th century.

1a. Empire Day Comes to Britain

In 1899, the Department of Education of Ontario, Canada decided that Queen Victoria’s birthday, May 24th, would henceforth be celebrated as “Empire

21 Ibid, 97. The term imperialist in this chapter refers to anyone, either Liberal or Conservative, who was steeped in the secular religion, “Faith of Empire,” whose fundamental tenet was “to hold [the Empire] as a sacred trust, and to pass on in such a fashion that those who come after may be proud of us.” Accordingly, this creed utilized a paradigm which interpreted the proper fulfillment of the duties of a British citizen in relation to the service they could provide for the entire empire. R.B. Haldane, Education & Empire; Addresses on Certain Topics of the Day (London: John Murray, 1902) vii. A conservative imperialist is defined by a more reactionary outlook which places certain authoritarian values such as self-abnegation and discipline as the perquisites for the maintenance of the empire.
Day” throughout its elementary and secondary schools. The holiday was to be comprised of history lessons about the empire, the singing of patriotic songs, and a venerating flag-raising ceremony. According to the Minister of Education in Ontario, George W. Ross, the entire procession was meant to “increase the interest of the pupils in the history of their own country, and strengthen their attachment to the Empire to which they belong.”

In Great Britain, when the philanthropist/imperialist Lord Meath heard about this holiday he could not help but wonder why such a beneficial “idea be confined to…Ontario?” Reginald Brabazon, the 12th Earl of Meath was an Irish aristocrat, who was greatly interested in the youth, in the empire and in using education to unite the two. As he made evident in his writings and speeches, the overarching goal of these activities was “to manufacture the ideal British citizen in the largest possible numbers.” However, this vision was far from utopian; he did not wish to create ideal citizens merely for their own sakes. Like many other imperialists, what lay at the heart of his social concerns was the nation-state and its empire. Thus, he promoted Empire Day for the potential social-psychological benefits that a universal day of thanksgiving and celebration could bring to the imperial enterprise. Since the British Empire at this point was spread across roughly one-fifth of the earth’s land mass and was supposedly constituted by 400 million inhabitants (“22% of the population of the Earth”), imperialists deemed such a potentially unifying event imperative.

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23 *The Times*, 24 May 1921, 11. This quote comes from an interview with Lord Meath almost two decades later.
25 “Empire Day”, *May 24th*. ([S.I.]: World Microfilms, 1973), 1. This document is a pamphlet released by the Empire Day Movement in 1908. It is entitled “Empire Day Movement: Letters, Address, and Information in Regard to the Empire Day Movement” and will be cited as such throughout the thesis.
In 1896, before the Canadian ceremony, Lord Meath had written a letter to *The Times* advocating the creation of a school holiday which would be dedicated to praising and learning about the empire.26 However, it was not until the Imperial Conference of 1902 held in London that Lord Meath decided to actively spread “Empire Day” beyond Canada. With all the leading statesmen, governors, princes and ministers gathered for the conference, Lord Meath decide to personally advocate the creation of an empire-wide school holiday in which children would listen “to lectures and recitations on subjects of an Imperial character.”27 As he told the various leaders of the empire, such a holiday would inspire imperial unity, i.e., hastening “the time when the whole Empire shall be more closely bound together than at present.”28 It was upon receiving affirmative replies and support from MPs and prime ministers of the dominions that Lord Meath decided to give his idea an official organ, the Empire Day Movement (EDM).29 Through the dissemination of pamphlets and other educational materials to the thousands of schools across the empire, the EDM aimed to institutionalize Empire Day widely.

Although he had accentuated the benefits of imperial unity to leaders of the dominions and colonies, his prime objective for the holiday within Great Britain was not imperial consolidation. To Lord Meath and other imperialists at this time – which means “most Englishmen at the turn of the century” – Great Britain was the heart and mind of the empire; simply put, since they were the

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27 Ibid, 92-3.
28 Ibid, 93.
29 As the founder of the organization and its main benefactor vis-à-vis a £5,000 annual indemnity Lord Meath greatly defined the character and rhetoric put forth by the EDM. He even claimed that he was responsible for its spirit, and in many ways he was right. Wherever the EDM is mentioned, either in contemporaneous newspapers or in more recent history books, Lord Meath is always the only figure mentioned. This is why despite the lack of records as to who composed the Empire Day Movement, it can still be ascertained that the EDM was a direct reflection of Lord Meath’s ideology and worldview. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 118 and *The Times*, 13 May 1905, 7.
inheritors of this empire, it was their “burden” to maintain. As Meath said in an Empire Day speech in 1907, the holiday was meant to remind all “Anglo-Saxon” Britons, i.e., the rulers of the empire, of the “crushing sense of the overwhelming nature of the responsibilities and duties which God in his providence had thought fit to place individually upon [their] shoulders as citizens, or future citizens, or His greatest earthly State.” In fact, it seems that this idea of moral responsibility, one that was founded on a racialized conception of the empire, was omnipresent on Empire Day. At the same time, to the educators and imperialists who were to adopt the holiday, responsibility or duty was not only framed in terms of directly fighting for the empire or administrating it, but also with regard to doing more mundane and localized tasks such as positively contributing to one’s family, teacher or community. Thus, Lord Meath was aligned with both liberal and conservative educational philosophies, when he said that the children must be “taught [on Empire Day, and throughout the school year] a moral form of training, which shall have for its aim the inculcation of the virtues which conduce to the creation of good citizens.”

But the question still remains, what factors influenced the rhetoric of the holiday? Also, why did so many feel that the populace of Great Britain needed to be reminded of their duties to their empire? To explore this question an analysis of Great Britain at the time of Empire Day’s founding is necessary. This will help us to better understand why a children’s holiday was assigned the function of preserving the British Empire.

31 *The Times*, 25 May 1907, 8.
32 In almost every newspaper summary of the events of Empire Day reference is made to speeches which the children’s responsibility to empire.
33 How imperial patriotism was used as part of an ongoing part of socializing children to be proper citizens will be examined more fully in chapter two.
34 *The Times*, 13 May 1905, 4.
Ib. The ‘Parlous Position’ of England

After enjoying what was remembered as a long century of unequalled global and commercial dominance, many in Great Britain saw the dawning of the 20th century as the premier opportunity not only to reflect on past glories, but also and more importantly, to shift their concerns onto future challenges. Britannia had proven herself to be the indisputable star of the world stage for most of the 19th century by “contending successfully [in commerce, in finance and all other elements of power] with all other nations combined” and it was her guiding light that had led the world “to modern industrialism.” However, according to periodicals being printed at the time, the potential mental inertia and complacency created by this illustrious history, or as one contemporary put it, “the sense of ease... that has followed an unexampled prosperity”, was downright deleterious to the “future well being of the nation.” What concerned many imperialists was the disconnect between Britain’s past glories and the immediacy of the problems of the present.

As one journalist noted, although in terms of power among nations, Great Britain still possessed an “immense lead,” many were cautious, if not downright pessimistic about the future. The world had rapidly changed, so much so that it gave the Times enough confidence to report in January 1909, “that no generation ever had to deal with evils so great and perplexing as those of the present day.” The passing of this unrivaled greatness seemed for many to be embodied by the death of the Queen Victoria in January 1901. As Arthur Balfour, soon to be

35 Andrew Carnegie, "British Pessimism," Nineteenth Century and After 49 (1901), 902.
Conservative Prime Minister, noted to the House of Commons, the “grief affects us...because we feel that the end of a great epoch had come upon us.”

The following paragraphs will clarify why journalists, especially those working in the conservative press, such as the and probably many of their readers believed that Great Britain was in a "parlous position." This solemn mood was captured most fittingly by Rudyard Kipling, the acknowledged “Voice of the Empire,” in his popular work entitled “Recessional,” which had been written for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897. This poem encapsulated the perceived threat of not only national, but also imperial decline that seemed to be imbuing British society at this time. In the poem, Kipling calls the permanence of the empire into question. As one particularly poignant verse noted:

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.42

To assume, however, that Edwardian imperialists were fatalistic about their empire would be a gross overstatement; the developments of the previous decades simply had made them appropriately uneasy about the future of Great Britain. As Kipling’s poem notes, the empire will fail only if people forget their duty to the empire. In fact, this poem so clearly emphasized the necessity of responsibility and duty to the empire that it was commonly recited or sung on Empire Day.

Another song, Edward VII’s coronation ode, proclaimed Great Britain to be “The Land of Hope and Glory” and any “good” patriot understood that the empire’s

39 Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind, 16.
40 The Times was the leading conservative newspaper. Other popular conservative periodicals included The Fortnightly Review and The Nineteenth Century and After.
41 Ibid, 18.
42 “Empire Day Movement: Letters, Address, and Information in Regard to the Empire Day Movement,” 1.
destiny was undoubtedly still in its own hands. Thus, as one journalist noted, although the country was unambiguously “in a crisis of the utmost gravity”, the present paradoxically held the potential for either “ruinous decadence” or “magnificent endurance.”

The omnipresent question which the events of the last decades had engendered was, according to the prominent conservative journalist J.L. Garvin, “[w]hether an Empire which could only have reached its present extent under political and commercial conditions that have passed away can be maintained under the conditions now prevailing.” As Garvin articulated in another article, the wars and economic developments of the last half-century of global history “shook the older order of the world to pieces;” what was most threatening to Britain and her world-wide empire was that “all the Powers that count[ed]” had “become world-Powers.” Indeed, in many of the articles printed by periodicals at this time there was a sense of awareness, daresay perspective, about the consequences of the long nineteenth century for the future success of Great Britain.

In particular, the emergence of Germany and the United States as fully industrialized nations inherently undermined Great Britain’s former technological, industrial and military advantage over almost all countries in the world. Most notably, Germany’s military might and expanding sea-power disrupted the balance of power on the continent and was deemed inherently antithetical to Great Britain.

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45 J.L. Garvin, “The Compulsion of Empire,” The National Review, Vol. 57, 1906, 501-2. It must be noted that the National Review was a right-wing periodical. Not everyone in Great Britain was so fearful, but these concerns seemed to be constantly echoed by any article that dealt with foreign affairs.
Britain’s prosperity. Indeed, it was Germany’s territorial ambitions that led Meath to conclude that the children of Britain needed a more profound attachment to the empire. 46 As will be shown later in this chapter, many imperialists believed that the affections created by the holiday would create citizens ready to defend the empire’s boundaries which would inevitably be needed.

The Social Darwinian theory that permeated this time period served as a powerful rationale for those concerned about the empire; the idea of “survival of the fittest” applied just as much to nations as it did to individuals. The newly realized territorial ambitions of these rapidly industrializing European and extra-European nations had transformed the imperializing fray which Great Britain had long dominated. In the wake of the “scramble for Africa,” alarmed imperialists believed that the rivals of Great Britain were merely waiting for “an opportunity to seize or absorb portions of its territory. This [was] a fact which England would do well to lay to heart.”47 As Lord Meath noted in 1902, the presence of “Germany, Russia, the United States, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Turkey, and Portugal, besides many barbarous and semi-barbarous countries” alongside the empire potentially threatened all of the various “constituent parts.”48 This was a result of the fact that the empire had changed over the last three decades; between 1870 and 1902, Great Britain had added 80 million inhabitants to the empire and almost 5,000,000 new square miles. Although Edwardians were not necessarily afraid of war with some of the aforementioned powers, e.g., the United States or

46 Mangan, “The ‘Grit’ of Our Forefathers,” 127. Lord Meath’s fear of the German’s dated back to the 1860s when he was a British diplomat and served in Germany and France. From his time in Berlin and Frankfurt, he found that the Germans had a certain self-pride and hostility against Great Britain. According to an interview with the The Times he did in 1921, this led him to conclude that England was “in for trouble” for “there would be war sooner or later” with the Germans. The Times, 24 May 1921, 11.
48 Meath, Brabazon Potpourri, 96.
Belgium, the point remains that they still felt threatened by the presence of so many countries that equaled or rivaled them in military and industrial power.

It was not only external threats that scared the Edwardians. As the founder of Empire Day professed, “The survival of the fittest is a doctrine which holds as good in the political and social as in the national world.”\(^49\) Although this social Darwinian paradigm claimed that human history marched forward, it did not preclude the distinct possibility that it could also take a step back. In Great Britain at this time, it was perceived not only that the international competition was growing fiercer, but also, that the British populace was deteriorating, both physically and mentally. Historian Samuel Hynes, upon examining British literature at this time noted that the ideas of “decay,” “decline and fall,” and “decadence” appeared in the lexicon of many people across the political spectrum.\(^50\) More specifically, there was a large section of British society, both conservative and liberal, that feared as did many in Europe, the “feebleness…lack of knowledge, absence of sympathy or interest in the world and humanity, [and] atrophy of the notion of duty and morality.”\(^51\) This was caused by a variety of factors, notably, modern urbanization, crowded housing, and most importantly, poor education. As a result, misgivings about society found expression against a wide variety of social ills, from the popularity of spectator sports, to a lack of physical health, to a slacking of parental discipline.

\(^49\) Mangan, “The ‘Grit’ of Our Forefathers,” 129.
\(^50\) Hynes, *Edwardian Turn of Mind*, 45.
\(^51\) Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, (London?: D. Appleton, 1895), 536. This work, by the Paris-based German journalist, was a searing and hyperbolic denunciation of many European artists and other cultural agents. Although imperialists in England focused on other problems, the expressions of the concerns were quite similar. Indeed, it was quite successful in England. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, *The Fin De Siecle: A Reader in Cultural History, C. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.
This social question was also an imperial question. The machineries and materials of Great Britain were worthless if the men and women who controlled them did not have the discipline and knowledge to maximize their potential contribution to the imperial system. In other words, the success of Great Britain rested on above all the character of its people. As will be expanded upon later, the ethical code behind the Empire Day Movement was a direct reaction to this perceived decadence. In particular, its specific character can be understood as Lord Meath attempt to fumigate, through imperial patriotism and notions of good citizenship, the moral rot he saw infesting society.

Fears of nation-wide decadence started to truly gain momentum after the catastrophic second Boer War which lasted from 1899-1902. It seemed that with the disasters of the first months of the campaign, “the comfortable self-contentedness of [the previous] fifty years vanished in a moment.” In the end, although Great Britain had achieved its goal by securing South Africa, its gold and diamond mines and a clear route to India, it had been a pyrrhic victory. It took £200,000,000 in expenditures and required nearly half a million men to put down a rebellion of disorganized Dutch farmers whose total population, women and children included, was hardly one hundred thousand. As one journalist put it, “What we looked upon as a mere pebble in our path has all but sufficed to shatter the wheels of our Empire.” The popular despair about the effectiveness of the army quickly diffused onto other aspects of British society as well. From a survey of the contemporary literature and the historiography produced afterwards, it

55 Charles Copland Perry, "Our Undisciplined Brains - the War-Test," Nineteenth Century and After 50 (1901), 895.
appears that the Boer War was the nadir of the efficacy and ability of Great Britain’s army, navy, government and even educational system to maintain the nation’s pre-eminent position in the world.

To Lord Meath, the Boer War had shown the “folly of believing that such an empire can be adequately protected by so ridiculously small a number of [200,000 white soldiers recruited by voluntary enlistment].” In response, Empire Day was conceived with a strong regard to increasing the sentiments and affection towards the imperial system throughout the whole empire. As the leader of the Royal Colonial Institute, a group committed to promoting imperial studies in schools, noted in 1905, Empire Day would be only second behind telegraphic communications in strengthening the connection between the disparate parts. In Edwardian Britain, it was this kind of mutual affection that would transcend the immense distance between the various colonies and dominions and make the empire stronger in response to internal and external threats.

However, more importantly, the Boer War, at least to Lord Meath and many imperialists, had shown that the British population lacked the discipline which would enable them to be effective soldiers and effective citizens of the empire. The staggering number of men who were deemed unfit to fight in the war was symptomatic of the moral degeneration occurring in Britain. Lord Meath noted one particularly telling example that occurred in Manchester: out of 11,000 men who volunteered for the army, only 1,000 after training were deemed “fit to

56 Meath, Brabazon Potpourri, 95.
57 The Times, 20 May 1905, 8.
58 Edmund Burke first articulated in the 18th century that emotional ties were more powerful than legal or political unions in building commitment to the empire. Since then, imperialists had been reinitiating this notion through the ages. James G. Greenlee, Education and Imperial Unity, 1901-1926 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), xv.
be sent abroad to fight the battles of their country.” 59 This figure was most likely an exaggeration, but the accepted figure for rejection from service was still an unsettling forty percent. 60 Lord Meath reminded the House of Lords that in light of higher German acceptance rates, a national enquiry into the physical conditions of the nation was in fact a “question of self-preservation.” 61 This reasoning suggests that international competition and moral degeneration combined to create this perceived Edwardian crisis. To imperialists, in a dangerous and competitive international arena, any slackening by the British population would lead to a dismembering of the empire and perhaps British greatness. Thus, the two goals for Empire Day, imperial unity and moral regeneration, were in fact two sides of the same coin for both were “solutions” to the problems which threatened the survival of the empire. However, it also seems that within Great Britain, the social and moral concerns prevailed in the considerations of many imperialists. 62

One journalist noted with a tongue-in-cheek attitude, that although some were content with the present state, so was a man who after falling from a sixteenth story of a house, upon reaching the fourth exclaimed, “Why it’s not nearly as bad as I feared it would be; indeed if it only continues like this I shall be satisfied.” 63 In response to the dangers caused by complacency, one militaristic imperialist wrote, “We have no time to lose... We must “wake up” to the stern fact

59 Meath and Meath, Thoughts on Imperial and Social Subjects, 217.
60 Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, 48.
62 There is one more factor, albeit implicit, why Lord Meath and many others started Empire Day at this time. During the Boer War, the British had committed a great number of atrocities against the Boers, e.g., by ushering them into concentration camps and burning their houses. As James Greenlee has pointed, these horrors created a crisis of conscience in the minds of Edwardian Britons. Therefore, Empire Day could also be an attempt to restore the ideal of the empire which the war so effectively undermined. Greenlee, Education and Imperial Unity, 12.
that we live in a world governed by unchanging, inflexible and relentless laws.”

Thus, what was needed to the save Great Britain and its empire was direct action which would revitalize the national fabric.

Ic. Education and Empire

It seems that by the turn of the century, concerned imperialists were coming to see a vital link between education and the future of the empire; indeed, “education and empire” became a slogan among the more politically conscious circles. As one journalist put it, “school-power” just as much as “sea-power” was “rapidly becoming [a] more conscious [object] of national desire.” The failures of the Boer War had only furthered demonstrated that the national spirit being imparted to the youth was lackluster and insufficient for the challenges of the 20th century. Thus, Lord Meath struck a resonant chord when he exclaimed in his Empire Day speech at Exeter Hall in 1905, “the only hope is in the education of the young.” The propagation of Empire Day itself, not just by the EDM but by a smattering of educators and conservative interest groups that will be discussed later on in the thesis, should be understood as an attempt to use the schools and imperial patriotism to save Great Britain and its empire.

65 Greenlee, Education and Imperial Unity, 1901-1926, xiii.
67 Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, 51.
68 “Empire Day Movement: Letters, Address, and Information in Regard to the Empire Day Movement,” 10. Lord Meath’s rationale was formulated in modern parental discourse which acknowledged the formativeness of childhood. As he said, the holiday was aimed at the youth because that was when the mind was, according to his speech at Exeter Hall highlighted in the Empire Day pamphlet, “more open to receive the impression either of noble and elevating ideas and sentiments or of the reverse.”
To many other like-minded imperialists, both Liberal and Conservative, the state-aided schools through which the majority of the British citizens passed were a prime, untapped conduit for instilling proper sentiments in the youth. One way in which education in general and the lessons surrounding Empire Day in particular could be utilized to the benefit of the empire was by eliminating ignorance of imperial affairs. Deploying an analogy to which fellow aristocrats could relate, Lord Meath reminded the House of Lords in 1893 that, “No prudent guardians would bring the heir to a large estate without telling him its extent and capabilities of development.”\textsuperscript{69} This would be remedied by teaching the children the facts of geography, history and other knowledge about the empire that they would one day control.

However, for much of the Victorian era, the working class was hardly deemed to be the heirs of the Empire. As Bernard Porter wrote in his comprehensive study of the empire’s impact, or lack thereof, on British culture, during most of the nineteenth century, “the empire itself did not require… interest and commitment from the British people; it could function perfectly well – indeed, probably better – without it.”\textsuperscript{70} However, the pressures of the present created a state of affairs in which even “the humblest child” according to Meath, would have to in a few years be called on “to fulfill his or her duty to the empire.”\textsuperscript{71} Therefore, Lord Meath’s desire to have the working class more imperially aware marked a turn towards making the empire, at least ostensibly, a more democratic endeavor. His rationale partially stemmed from the fact that after the reforms of 1884-5, the majority of the electorate who decided the composition of the British Parliament was educated in state-aided schools. As he said during

\textsuperscript{69} Bernard Porter, \textit{The Absent-Minded Imperialists}, 170.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 164.
\textsuperscript{71} Horn, “English Elementary Education and the Growth of the Imperial Ideal: 1880-1914,” 40.
the inaugural celebration of Empire Day, the awareness about imperial affairs raised by the holiday would make people “informed and [thereby] not let them be taken advantage by self-serving politicians.” This was the “real root of the mischief which Empire Day [was] meant to combat.”

To imperialists greatly concerned about the future of the empire, children not only needed to learn about the workings of the empire, but also and more importantly to feel actively compelled to support it in the proper way. This could be accomplished through a moral training of the children which would inherently inculcate patriotism and loyalty into the hearts and minds of the children. As Lord Meath claimed, “the moral character of the people…determine[d] the position which such nation shall occupy in the world;” in turn, he hoped Empire Day would elevate the “moral character of the people it affect[ed].” Thus, above all, Empire Day would have to be utilized to help propagate a specific code of conduct, one founded on discipline, responsibility and self-sacrifice and inspired by patriotism, which would strengthen the character of the children and thereby strengthen Great Britain.

Id. ‘Responsibility, Duty, Sympathy, Self-Sacrifice’

Empire Day was supposed to be more than just another expression of the imperialist’s desire to make the empire “part of the educational consciousness of

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72 The Times, 25 May 1904, 4. Who exactly Meath saw as “self-serving politicians” is not made explicitly clear. However, given his political and social attitudes and his background as an aristocratic Tory, he probably distrusted the members on the Left who hoped to change the existing nature of the Great Britain and its empire. At this time, it was the Irish Parliamentary which aimed to disassociate Ireland from the United Kingdom and the socialists which aimed to completely change the existing social structure. The politics behind Empire Day will be more closely examined in chapter 4.

73 Meath and Meath, Thoughts on Imperial and Social Subjects, 246

74 The qualifier “imperial” should be understood as it is used in the term imperial patriotism. The focus of the paradigm is above all the nation-state of Great Britain and fundamental to the nation-state was its empire.
the state-educated.” To Lord Meath, the outward celebrations of Empire Day would awaken children to “the importance to the British race of realizing the responsibilities and duties attaching to British citizenship.” However, the Empire Day Movement put forth a very specific kind of probity that required more than simply “fulfilling one’s duty.” As mentioned earlier, Lord Meath, like many other Edwardian imperialists, believed that certain virtues, especially discipline, were eroding in Great Britain. The problem was that as with the Roman empire, an analogy that was in frequent use during this time, the fall of the British empire would invariably be due to “internal decay rather than to outward shock.” In other words, since the empire and Great Britain’s commercial position had been won “by hard struggle” and “grit”, the maintenance of its boundaries required the perpetuation of those virile characteristics. Unfortunately for Great Britain, as Meath noted in a pamphlet published in 1908, internal decay had set in; pleasure had become the new “god–self-indulgence the object aimed at.” In his inaugural Empire Day speech he explicitly highlighted ignorance of imperial affairs as an example of such internal decay. More notably, however, the “enervating luxury,” “the spirit of selfishness,” and “immorality and lack of public spirit” which had grown within Great Britain would lead directly to the degeneration of Britain’s greatness.

This set of virtues which the Empire Day Movement strove to constantly rearticulate and transmit to the working-class children was commonly referred to

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76 The Times, 20 April 1906, 4.
77 Meath and Meath, Thoughts on Imperial and Social Subjects, 246.
78 The Times, 25 May 1904, 4.
79 Reginald Brabazon Meath, “Have We the ‘Grit’ of Our Forefathers,” Nineteenth Century and After 64 (1908), 426.
80 “Empire Day Movement: Letters, Address, and Information in Regard to the Empire Day Movement,” 12.
the as the “public school spirit” – i.e., self-sacrifice, self-control and the endurance of pain with a cheerfulness. The reference is to England’s public schools – which should be understood in today’s term as elite private schools – which educated many members of the ruling classes for many generations. It was probably during his time at one of England’s most famous and authoritarian public schools, Eton, that Lord Meath learned the Spartan code of conduct that he would later attempt to instill into the British children a half century later.\(^{81}\)

In his autobiography Meath vividly recalled his entire class being scolded by the headmaster for wiping away snow: “You young worms! Do you call yourselves British boys? Shame on you! Your fathers are the rulers of England, and your forefathers have made England what she is now…You will have to maintain the Empire which they made.”\(^{82}\) Although maintenance of the empire was framed as a masculine job, all members of society were expected to be disciplined and patriotic. Women, too, had a specific place in the society, one that was always framed in relation to being good mothers and wives to the men who would fight for the empire one day.\(^{83}\) Meath believed that this “spirit” was not being “sufficiently grasped by either parents or teachers in the present day, and the inculcation of which on the youth of the 20\(^{th}\) century [was] sadly neglected.”\(^{84}\) Such citizen training would make hard-working individuals that were efficient and productive; at the same time, it was not lost on the imperialists that this spirit reflected the values of good soldiering.

Lord Meath was not alone in his desire to reassert the virtues of discipline and self-sacrifice over a broader section of society than had ever been done

\(^{81}\) Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire,” 98.
\(^{82}\) Reginald Brabazon Meath, Memories of the Nineteenth Century (London: John Murray, 1923), 19.
\(^{83}\) The gendered conception of citizenship will be explored at length in the next chapter.
\(^{84}\) The Times, 20 October 1904, 13.
before. One journalist believed that it was this spirit alone – an “undefinable mixture of pluck, knowledge, good humour, self-reliance, self-restraint, loyalty to institutions and readiness to play the game according to the rules” – which would prevent the “softening” of the society.85 In turn, in 1905 the Board of Education released a *Handbook of Suggestions* for elementary school teachers and recommended the use of games that would promote ”*esprit de corps*, readiness to endure fatigue, to submit to discipline, and to subordinate one’s own powers and wishes to a common end.”86 Further evidence of the prevalence of the public school ethos is offered by the popularity of ”*public school fiction*” – one which espoused the aforementioned characteristics – among “*state*” educated students.87 The Empire Day Movement, and to a lesser extent, the spread of Empire Day, can therefore be understood as part of how the public school tradition began to gain “wider social sanction, visibility and expression” during this time.88

In response to modernization and democratization, many conservative Edwardians anxious about Great Britain and its empire hoped to alleviate their fears by creating a revival of self-abnegation and stoicism. It was in the more conservative parts of England such as southern towns, coastal resorts and the suburbs of London that Empire Day took this particular character.89 Furthermore, it was at these expressions of Empire Day that the present dangers facing Great Britain commonly appeared in the rhetoric. As Lord Strathcona said in an Empire Day celebration in 1908 at Hampsstead, a suburb of London, “a nation imbued

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86 Penn, *Targeting Schools*, 124.
89 Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire,” 103.
with that [the public school spirit], ready to make sacrifices, if need be, to uphold its dignity… was not likely to be troubled with international difficulties.”  

The desire to propagate a specific ethos – one founded on discipline and self-sacrifice – was also expressed by the Edwardians’ adulation of the Japanese. Mostly due to reporting of *The Times* military correspondent Colonel Repington, who helped to popularize the concept of Bushido and the virtues associated with it, “an extravagant cult of Japan” rose up in Great Britain during this time.  

According to Meath, since the Mejii Restoration in 1867, Japan had ordered systematic and daily teachings on the virtues of loyalty to the empire, love of the country, and a belief that “the greater the sacrifice demanded by the State of the individual, the greater the honour.” Lord Meath hoped to “encourage, both in our homes and in our schools, the teaching of a somewhat similar spirit of respect” taught by the Japanese in their own schools. He even referred to Edward VII as “king-emperor” as a way of aligning his sentiments with what he saw as Japan’s austerity and obedience to its own emperor. This “cult of Japan” even affected the London County Council, the administrative body which was responsible for all of London’s state-aided school and some 800,000 children. On Empire Day in 1909, they requested that schools provide lessons about:  

the development of Japan in the arts of peace and war during the past 30 years, and the high sense of duty, the patriotic devotion, the subordination of self-interest to the good of the community, and the magnificent conception of public service which have been such important factors in that development.  

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90 *The Times*, 25 May 1908, 7.  
93 *The Times*, 20 October 1904, 13.  
These virtues were by no means omnipresent in society, but they do show how certain members of society hoped to strengthen Great Britain and its empire through an education which emphasized moral training, patriotism and authoritarian discipline.

Although pro-Japanese sentiments were deemed politically safe because of the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902, they arose mainly due to Japan’s decisive victories against Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. To Lord Meath and other imperialists, Japan’s success in its war with Russia was not merely due to superior military organization and preparedness, but also to the valiant fighting which this code of Bushido inherently inspired. Lord Lansdowne, a Liberal Unionist MP, reflected this belief when he said during Empire Day in 1905:

> If any great country desires to maintain its position amongst the nations of the earth it requires not only armies and navies of adequate strength…but armies and navies of which…every individual shall be in the highest state of efficiency and animated by a spirit of patriotism and devotion….\(^9^6\)

Thus, patriotism was integral to this conception of citizenship because it provided an emotive force which would elicit the right kind of behavior.

This martial mentality applied to other aspects of life as well. If children’s daily labor also were seen as serving the empire and thus undertaken with strict discipline and with a willingness to sacrifice one’s self, then, according to Lord Meath, “the product of such labour will in the future show itself to be as superior to that of the ordinary market as the Japanese Army and Navy have proved themselves to be to the military and naval forces under the bureaucratic system of

\(^9^6\) *The Times*, 2 June 1905, 11.
Indeed, the emphasis on industry was to become central to the various manifestations of Empire Day. As it will be shown, this martial spirit was thus part of citizen training; most importantly this type of training could be undertaken at schools.

Although promoting idealized notions of imperial patriotism, Lord Meath did not want every member of the working class to see the empire as a source of grandeur or wealth. He wished to maintain the empire through an strong emphasis on discipline; “consider duties before rights”, “subdue self”, and “obey the law” were commandments which guided how a British citizen should participate.

Whereas Meath believed that the subjects of the empire had more liberty and freedom than the most “advanced republics,” his vision of British society was still highly hierarchical. Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is applicable to understanding attempts by imperialists and educators to incorporate the working class into the maintenance of the imperial system. The supreme goal of the Empire Day Movement was to see the rising generation of working-class youths taught the importance of “subordination of individual to common interest.” Moreover, it was everyone’s “honorable obligation” to prepare one’s self “each in his or her own sphere, for the due fulfillment of the duties and responsibilities attached to the high privilege of being subjects of the mightiest Empire the world

98 Ibid.
99 Antonion Gramsci was an Italian Communist and political theorist active in the 1920s and 1930s. Gramsci devised a concept of cultural hegemony in which one class dominates society by imposing its values onto all other classes. In other words, the dominating class tried to convince the working class that it was within the latter’s best interest to identify with the empire. If successful, the dominating class could preserve the societal status quo. Imperial patriotism was a substance of this hegemonic culture. See Roger Simon, Gramsci’s Political Thought: an Introduction (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991).
100 “Empire Day Movement: Letters, Address, and Information in Regard to the Empire Day Movement,” 2.
has ever known.”\textsuperscript{101} Thus, in order to ensure imperial success and stability – in other words, the maintenance of the dominant social order – the imperial caste attempted to establish a consensus culture in which the goals of the working class were aligned with the preserving the status quo.\textsuperscript{102} The dominant class utilized education and extra-curricular activities such as Empire Day parades and other festivities in an attempt to collaborate with the working classes and integrate (as opposed to coerce) them into the proper functioning of society. However, as it will be shown, this process of incorporation took place a variety of levels, including schools and other public spheres. Thus, the national-imperial identity was not the preserve of a single caste, but rather an accepted and mainstream identity.

Inherent to his idea that everyone in Britain shared an obligation was the promotion of an inclusivity of sorts. The ideal of “sympathy”, one of the EDM’s watchwords, was probably meant to promote a harmony of feelings between all Britons. The holiday was intended to cut across class boundaries, as well as colonial and other nationalisms, to align everyone with the goal of the imperialists. As Lord Meath noted in a letter to the Times, there was “[n]o room for the existence of any party, class, sectional, or race feeling” and thus, “[n]o word, should, therefore, be said or written which may hurt the feelings of any human being.”\textsuperscript{103} It seems that sympathy for fellow Britons was meant to promote a unity of emotional sentiments toward Great Britain

This is not to say that there were other objectives in establishing Empire Day. In hoping to emphasize imperial unity, Meath used The Times to announce the Empire Day celebrations of every colony, dominion or dependency. Although

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. 7. Emphasis added by author.
\textsuperscript{103} The Times, 14 May 1906, 8\textsuperscript{e}.
discipline would allow Great Britain to maintain its periphery, Lord Meath knew that sentiments would facilitate this process by making the periphery willing to hold onto Great Britain. As he noted, “an Empire Day should be an important factor in preserving and increasing the unity of the British people in their vast dominions.” The value of such affection was greatly appreciated, because Lord Meath, like many others, believed that “sentiment in nations” was “often more powerful than law.”104 In fact, Empire Day was enthusiastically received in the dominions and it was there that it was first recognized as an official holiday. However, Empire Day has its own history in Great Britain that in many ways reflected the dilemmas of the metropole that felt obliged to rule the periphery. However it manifested itself in Great Britain is thus a reflection and refraction of the specifics of its unique imperial position.

1e. Conclusion

The timing of the foundation of Empire Day can be explained as resulting from the interaction between the external and internal factors, i.e., increased international competition, moral degeneration, the disasters of the Boer War and the values of many imperialists. Many wished to strengthen the character on which the empire rested and believed that education and imperial patriotism could inculcate the masses with the necessary imperial spirit. More specifically, Lord Meath and his Empire Day Movement promoted an ethical code that was founded on discipline, duty, and self-sacrifice. In fact, in speeches and in letters, Lord Meath referred to the EDM simply as the “empire movement” to suggest that its main objectives superseded the founding of a half-holiday from school.

104 Ibid., 25 April 1905, 5.
It must be remembered that the EDM put forth a holiday that was inherently decentralized; every city, school, or teacher controlled its own celebration. Thus, although Lord Meath planted the seed for Empire Day in many ways, it was only successful because it fell into fertile soil. In the opening years of the holiday, various newspaper accounts of the celebration of Empire Day reported that the school program suggested by the Empire Day Movement was similar to the actual manifestation of the holiday. Indeed, many of the ceremonies utilized similar songs and symbols and, to some extent, highlighted similar values in the speeches. In addition, the EDM’s message undoubtedly found a “network of support from influential sources”, e.g., clergymen, MPs, and military personnel, that put forth the message behind the movement.\textsuperscript{105} Thus, the invention of this tradition, with its specific imperial and disciplinary characteristics, revealed and reflected the nature of some popular British sociopolitical attitudes at this time.

The question remains how Lord Meath, and many like-minded imperialists or educators, planned to use this holiday to emphasize a moral regeneration throughout the British Isles. As Meath made evident, “no time should be lost in providing in schools such a curriculum as may enable scholars to appreciate the inner meaning of the movement.”\textsuperscript{106} As will be shown in the next chapter, Lord Meath’s holiday was readily incorporated by many teachers and headmasters because it relied on pre-established symbols of British (imperial) culture and also because it was protean enough that a variety of activities – from shooting competitions to essay competitions – could be successfully incorporated into the celebration of the holiday. Although Meath’s authoritarian emphasis on discipline was not common to many celebrations, it still seemed that similar notions of

\textsuperscript{105} Bloomfield, “Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism,” 81.
\textsuperscript{106} The Times, 2 June 1904, 15.
citizenship, imperial patriotism and martial values composed the content of many Empire Day celebrations.
Chapter Two
The ABCs of Imperial Citizenship: Empire Day in Schools

The rhetoric produced on Empire Day in England shows that the overarching objective of the holiday was to ensure that children became aware of their responsibility to the empire. But the questions remains, how was this expressed in schools and more importantly, how did educators use what was an annual event to achieve this perennial goal? In turn, an examination of the rituals, symbols and speeches used in a typical Empire Day celebration in the schools will not only elucidate what these responsibilities were, but also how educators hoped to have children accept them. The notions of citizenship provided to children on Empire Day – as well as throughout the school-year – were defined by a collectivist, yet highly gendered code of normative behaviors. However, unlike the rest of the school year, Empire Day was a celebratory event that marked a break from the monotony of the school syllabi. Accordingly, organizers hoped to utilize the patriotism and enthusiasm inspired by the holiday as the emotive force which would compel children to follow the specific notions of civic duty provided to them. This chapter will therefore examine how the symbols, myths and rituals provided to children constructed a specific national-imperial identity that aimed to advance the nation-state.

2a. The Typical Demonstration

Before examining the significance of its celebrations, the relative popularity and the typical manifestation of Empire Day in schools must be established. In the decade following its foundation, Empire Day became quite popular in England and in the rest of Great Britain. Each year, The Times and

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107 Heathorn, For Home, Country, and Race, chapter 7. Humphries, ‘Hurrah for England’: Schooling and the Working Class in Bristol, 1870-1914,” 175-180. This ideal of citizen training was prevalent in the philosophy of both liberal and conservative educators.
other newspapers claimed that the recent celebration was the most widespread and most elaborate one to date.\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, only seven years after the inaugural celebration held in one auditorium in London, \textit{The Times} noted that “the majority of the county education authorities in England and Wales” had officially sanctioned the holiday.\textsuperscript{109} In terms of sheer numbers, while approximately 1.2 million children took part the holiday within the United Kingdom in 1907, the number had risen to 5.5 million just five years later.\textsuperscript{110} The increase in the number of annual public parades, rifle shooting competitions, concerts, and other forms of imperial pageantry further attested to the public’s growing acceptance of the holiday.\textsuperscript{111}

Empire Day was above all intended for children and the mainstay of the holiday was the school procession in the morning. The typical celebration promoted by the London County Council (LCC), the municipal body which directed all the state-aided schools in London and some 800,000 children, will serve as the exemplar around which this analysis of Empire Day will be structured. In 1907 and for years thereafter, the LCC requested that during the fortnight leading up to Empire Day, the class lessons would give “specially directed attention to the growth and character of the British Empire.”\textsuperscript{112} Then on May 24\textsuperscript{th}, or on the closest appropriate school day, the schools were supposed to hold a special Empire Day program. In the morning, the children would assemble to listen to addresses by the headmaster or headmistress. These speeches usually

\textsuperscript{108} The only exception to this was in 1910 when celebrations were cancelled or toned down due to the death of Edward VII on May 6th. Indeed, the annual Hyde Park parade was cancelled. \textit{The Times}, 11 May 1910.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 24 May 1911, 7.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 8 June 1908, 8 and \textit{The Daily Mail}, 24 May 1912, 4.
\textsuperscript{111} The significance of these public spectacles, in particular the martial character present in them, will be analyzed in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{The Times} 25 May 1907, 6; Ibid. 25 May 1908, 8.
explained “the origin of Empire Day and its significance, gave an historical explanation of the Union Jack, and recounted briefly the main points of the lessons of the past fortnight.” The ceremony also included active participation of the children, either in the form of recitation of poetry or the performance of a play and always included the singing of patriotic songs. During most celebrations, Kipling’s “Recessional” – which revels on the ephemeral nature of empires and how they require great responsibility – or his “Children’s Song” were sung. Also, at some point in the morning, usually at the beginning or at the end of the ceremony, the children assembled in the playground or in the auditorium hall for a flag ceremony. After the Union Jack was formally unfurled, they would march-past* and salute it before singing the national anthem. Finally, at lunchtime, a half-holiday was rewarded to the children, such that they could spend it however they or their parents saw fit.114

It should be noted that the typical Empire Day celebration used the same symbols and rituals as the ones offered by EDM. However, this does not necessarily testify to the influence of Lord Meath’s Empire Day Movement. Rather it seems that Empire Day was so readily incorporated into schools because the symbols, the songs, and the lessons plans suggested EDM were already, to

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113 Ibid, 25 May 1907, 6.
* A “march-past” is a ceremony in which the children would march past the flag in an organized manner while being reviewed by a headmaster to ensure that their conduct was sufficiently disciplined.
114 The Times, 25 May 1907, 6. School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 77 (1907), 480. The School Government Chronicle was a periodical published for all kinds of individuals involved in education. It claimed to be “for over thirty-five years the recognised official organ of the educational authorities.”
115 The Empire Day program suggested by Meath included “a hoisting of the Union Jack”, singing the National Anthem, “saluting the flag”, “an address on the duties and responsibilities attaching to British Citizenship”, “a short Lecture on the Empire”, “the recitation of some Poem illustrative of heroic duty and of self-sacrifice on behalf of the Nation”, “the recitation of Rudyard Kipling’s Recessional Hymn “Lest we forget” and finally, “The National Anthem and final salute.” This was listed in The Times, 27 April 1904, 10. One can see that the rituals promoted by the EDM overlapped with the actual manifestation of the holiday.
varying extents, pre-established icons of British imperial culture. More importantly, however, the holiday took this form in so many places because the various educators and municipal bodies that put the time and energy into organizing the holiday accepted part, if not all, of the imperial ethos behind the aforementioned emblems.

2b. “Imperial” Citizenship

From the beginning, those who supported the holiday did so because they believed it would serve a specific function. The LCC – and most likely all the participating educational authorities – provided instructions to their schools for Empire Day which emphasized “avoiding a mere spectacular display, accompanied by artificial sentiment or extravagance of pride of possession.” The instructions stated that the prime objective of the holiday was that “some large conception ought to arise out of it.”117 Judging from its omnipresence in the rhetoric of Empire Day, this “large conception” was a realization by Britain’s children to the “true sense of the responsibilities attaching to their inheritance as children of the Empire.”118 In fact, although Lord Meath’s Spartan ethic was too authoritarian and militant for most liberal educators, his belief that each individual had a moral responsibility to the British state was endemic on Empire Day. In turn, the reports of the holiday from newspapers, although frequently brief, almost always mentioned a speech by “a mayor or other person on the meaning of Empire and the duty of citizens.”119 Or, as The Times reported, “the moral underlying every ceremony [on Empire Day]” was “the present responsibility of every British

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117 The Times, 16 April 1908, 9.
118 Ibid.
119 The Daily Mail, 24 May 1912, 6.
citizen, the future responsibility of every British child, for the maintenance of the great political system into which he has been born.”

As will be elucidated below, underlying this lofty idea of conserving the political system was a prescribed set of behaviors whose fulfillment was to be actualized in the children’s rather limited and domestic life. From an examination of the poems, songs and speeches used on Empire Day, it appears that the goal of the holiday was part of the ongoing process of socializing the children to the established social order. This type of moral training was intended from the beginning. As Lord Meath noted in The Times, “the sense of civic duty should find their expression in action at home, and afterwards extend themselves to the farthest limits of the Empire.” Indeed, the locus of Lord Meath’s Empire Day watchwords, “responsibility, duty, sympathy, self-sacrifice,” was highly local. More specifically, what was laid out for children on Empire Day was an ethical doctrine that emphasized a series of established morals such as obedience, hard-work, honesty, and in the more austere cases, self-abnegation and sacrifice. At the same time, these domestic duties were still framed as “imperial.” Indeed, by teaching the children proper values, educators strove to be concurrently strengthening the moral resolve of the children to maintain their great inheritance.

However, this conception of moral duty was consistently referred to as an obligation of “citizenship;” a notion that intrinsically included a sense of belonging to the British nation-state. In turn, imperial patriotism – pride in the British nation-state and its possessions – was an integral part of the construction

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120 The Times, 24 May 1909, 13.
121 The Times, 6 June 1904, 11.
of national identity. Essentially, educators used the imperial patriotism on Empire Day to frame pontificating lessons about the mundane duties of every Briton. In turn, the lessons became a poignant call to serve the mightiest and most righteous empire the world has ever seen. Thus, the enthusiasm roused by having children participate in physical acts such as singing, marching and saluting would facilitate the internalization of the code of conduct provided to them by their educators.123

In fact, the connection between the celebration of the empire and the transmittance of this social doctrine was overtly clear to those organizing the holiday. “The child thinks much in images,” observed the unabashedly imperialistic \textit{Daily Express} “and to-day’s ceremonies should teach our future citizens something of the greatness of their country, and should stir them with the ambition to give it the best of their services.”124 The integral role of patriotism in the discursive expression of the aforementioned citizenship will be examined below.

\textbf{2c. The Empire as Inspiration}

The British political sociologist’s, T.H. Marshall, noted in the 1950s that “[t]here is no universal principle that determines what [the] rights and duties [of citizenship] should be, but societies…create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed.”125 It was during the history and geography lessons provided in the two weeks leading up to Empire Day that educators provided to children the image of the inspirational “ideal citizens.” In fact, the school readers and other forms of literature that children encountered throughout the school year constantly extolled

\footnotesize{123} Bloomfield, "Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism," 74.
\footnotesize{124} \textit{The Daily Express}, 25 May 1909, 4. Ironically, at this time, there were no legal citizens for everyone was technically the subject of the monarch. This only further reinforces how the ideal of citizenship was not related to any legal status.
“virile martial heroes” who sacrificed themselves to defend the glory of Great Britain. ¹²⁶ However, Empire Day—with its imperial pageantry and overt messages—marks a particularly concentrated period of edifying symbols and myths.

The titles and authors of the books suggested by the Empire Day Book of Patriotism (1912), a pamphlet disseminated to schools, provide a clue into the content and the message of the history lessons children were experiencing. Out of 66 suggested titles, half were written by the unabashedly imperialistic and militaristic authors, G.A. Henty and Rudyard Kipling. Indeed, the intentions of these authors to proselytize were never hidden; as G.A. Henty wrote, “To endeavour to inculcate patriotism in my books has been one of my main objects.”¹²⁷ The archetypal plot structure of their works involved a model Englishman whose superiority allows him to be triumphant in either a colonial or a European conflict.¹²⁸ However, these works not only roused patriotism in the readers’ hearts, but also provided clear character traits for the students to emulate.

Another sample lesson plan was a course of lectures provided by interest group “The League of the Empire” for Empire Day which celebrated “empire-builders” such as Alfred the Great, James Wolfe, and James Cooke.¹²⁹ Like the aforementioned books, these lectures of “history” are narratives of heroic deeds and courageous accomplishments that were designed not only to entertain and to inspire, but also and more importantly, to provide a didactic moral. For example,

¹²⁹ The League of the Empire was a conservative interest group founded in 1901 that aimed to reinforce imperial unity by, among other things, standardizing the school curriculum across the empire. As will be shown below, it was also involved in organizing the Hyde Park Empire Day parade. Greenlee, Education and Imperial Unity, 12, 61.
The first lecture was on Alfred, an Anglo-Saxon king from the 9th century and it began the lesson by asking why Alfred was “great.” In response, it told the children that Alfred as well as all empire-builders were not idealized because of their “riches,” “successful ambition” or even “saintliness.” Instead, what made them so honorable was their “high aims, and success in attaining them;” what constituted a “high aim” was if it lacked “personal ambition” or “empty glory.” The lecture of Alfred concluded with a summation of his spirit, “the English ideal.” What is offered is a verse by Rudyard Kipling, but as the children were reminded, “every sentence and word of which might be Alfred’s.” The verse stated:

Keep ye the law, be swift in all obedience,
Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford:
Make ye sure to each his own
That he reap where he hath sown;
By the peace among our peoples let men know we serve
The Lord.

What made the heroes so great were not necessarily who they were – Alfred aside, none of the empire-builders were nobility – but what they did. This ideal citizen showed to the working-class children that they, too, could be great if they put aside their selfish ambitions and fulfilled their duty to the empire. As the Kipling verse suggests however, duty meant above all being law abiding (“Keep ye the law”) and industrious (“drive the road and bridge the ford”). In fact, the message was aligned with the year-long schooling which aimed at character building. However instead of using the usual cleanliness inspections or playgrounds drills,

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130 Stride, W.K. Empire-Builders: A Course of Lectures (London: John Murray, 1906), 1. The book actually instructs that the beginning of any of the lectures should note what makes the aforementioned personnel great.
131 Ibid., 2-5.
132 Ibid., 17.
the teachers promoted “good citizenship” through the tales of English heroes and their deeds.\footnote{Davin, Growing Up Poor, 116. Cleanliness inspections were fairly common in Edwardian state schools.}

It is by including children on this long and prosperous national narrative that these stories hoped above all to induce children to maximize their utility to society. Indeed, on Empire Day, moral training was justified not through religion or individual well-being, although they were included, but above all, by the collective contribution one could make to the righteous empire. Such an ideal was meant to cut across class boundaries for everyone could serve the empire, regardless of whether or not the individual would ever have the money to see the empire or the power to administer it. Paradoxically, this notion of service was meant to reinforce the social hierarchy, not to demolish it. As the Kipling verse noted, “Make ye sure to each his own/That he reap where he hath sown.” Therefore, obedience to established authority and discipline was still the foundation of citizenship.

At this time, educators, in hopes of continuing the nation-state and its empire into the distant future, accepted their part in helping children understand the necessity of being a contributing member of society. The patriotic poems which the Empire Day Book of Patriotism (1912) saw as “inspiring and effective” also offer insight into how the patriotic identity put forth on Empire Day was essentially a “social prescription.”\footnote{Cowper, “Education and Imperialism”, 421 and Heathorn, For Home, Country, and Race, 197.} For example, “The Children’s Song” by Rudyard Kipling, “the most famous poet of patriotism now living,” reminded the children to “rule [themselves] away/Controlled and cleanly night and day/That we
may bring, if need arise. No maimed or worthless sacrifice.” In this verse, highly individualized behaviors such as basic hygiene and self-control were justified by the service they would provide to the collective empire. More specifically, as Kipling wrote and the children recited, such behaviors were necessary for they would provide the moral strength and discipline that was necessary to sacrifice for the greater community “if need arise.” Thus, a specific utilitarian and corporate attitude is being imparted to the children.

Another poem recommended by the Empire Day Book of Patriotism was “The Call of the Empire.” It exemplified how pride in the empire always brought duties with it. As the poem reads:

Hark! The Empire calls, and we what answer give?
How to Prove us worthy of the splendid trust?
Lo! We serve the Empire by the lives we live;
True in all our dealings, honest, brave and just.

Although this rhetoric is vague, albeit inspiring, it quickly becomes more specific. It urges that the children must their “mind and body for the Empire’s need; Blending pity and courage and strength of hand and brain[.]” Moreover, they must be, “Courteous to strangers, nor by lightest deed Staining Britain’s honour for a selfish gain.” Thus, on Empire Day, and throughout the school year, educators told children not to lie, steal, cheat or do anything that would violate established Judeo-Christian morals. However, the motivating influence was not necessarily “God,” as it had been in 19th century British education, but rather bringing honor to Great Britain itself and to the empire. This is not to say that Christianity was not a fundamental part of the imperial ethos, but rather to

136 C.E. Byles, “The Call of the Empire”, in Ibid., 11.
show how prominent the ideal of the nation-state had become to the identity put forth by educators.

In fact, the nation was so important that it was imbibed with the power to supersede both political or class identifications. As the “Call of the Empire” continued:

Comrades all Exulting in our common blood,  
Every deed we do be done for England’s sake:  
Sink the spite of parties in the common good:  
    Toward the goal of Empire be each step we take.  
Tho’ out lot be humble, void of wealth or fame,  
    England needs the lowliest service truly wrought:  
Not thro’ soft enjoyment her dominion came:  
    Not in gilded languor was her glory brought.138

Children, regardless of how poor they were, could still see themselves as contributing members of the empire for even the “lowliest” task would directly serve the empire. This imperial message aimed to establish an esprit de corps throughout the country that would be available to as many children as possible. As one circular disseminated to teachers by the LCC in 1913 noted, “scarcely any lesson that a child can learn in school is more valuable than this, that the honour of a country is in the hands of the least of its people.”139 Indeed, by pegging every child as part of the imperial corporation, educators hoped to motivate the children to fulfill the duties that inherently accompanied this identity. To use an analogy, it seems this popular patriotism was the sugar which would help them swallow the medicine of being obedient and hard-working citizens.

This is not to say that the notion of imperial citizenship were not exclusive. One still had to be “white”, to speak English and to pledge loyalty to the sovereign. In fact, the assumed superiority of the whites over the 350 million non-

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139 Empire Day.... : Extracts.... Taken from the Circular Issued by the London County Council in 1913 to Its Trachers, Containing Suggestions as to the Celebration of Empire Day, School Peace League Leaflet ; No. 9 ([S.1]: British Library).
white members of the empire was the foundation of the British self-image. Indeed, this exclusive process of identification was in fact dependent on the “dependent races” as a crucial concept for giving value to the image of Britons. At the same time, this paradigm aimed to promote a classless “national sameness.”140 As the aforementioned poem noted, “Comrades all Exulting in our common blood.” Children were told to recognize themselves as equivalent to other children who had the same prerequisite characteristics of being British. In other words, to those involved with the education of the youth, the ideal of the empire was treated as an adhesive which hold society together.

2d. Good English Boys vs. Good English Girls

A scripted dialogue made for Empire Day in 1912 succinctly revealed the gendered nature – in a sense that boys and girls had different responsibilities – of this conception of citizenship. The plot of the dialogue is simple and straightforward; a group of school children are debating the importance of Empire Day during their half-holiday when a student dressed as Britannia – a gendered conception itself – comes onto the scene to properly educate them about the meaning of the empire.141 “Surely it is plain” she reminds them, “That each fresh power brings duties in its train.”142 After denouncing empty jingoistic boasting and teaching them about all the distance territories, she – like the textbooks and readers that the children were most likely encountering during the school year–

140 Yeandle, “Lessons in Englishness and Empire, c. 1880-1914,” 284. Indeed, thiw racialized conception formed a fundamental part of the late-Victorian and Edwardian conscience. The details of this worldview have been explicated by many others, most notably, Paul Gilroy, There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), sections 2 and 3.
141 Heathorn, For Home, Country, and Race, 57.
tells the children that it is up to each individual to share the burden of the empire’s maintenance.

The character of Britannia first deals with the young boys and notes that the empire cannot succeed unless “every loyal son/Is prompt to answer at his country’s call.”¹⁴³ The most direct and noble way to do so was to serve in the military or receive military training. In many ways, this was the perfect embodiment of the imperial ethos: a love for the country which inspired discipline and self-sacrifice.¹⁴⁴ However, equally important were other characteristics and actions which were to be exercised on a daily basis that did not deal directly with the military. As Britannia reminded the boys:

> The man who’s doing any honest work,  
> Sticks to it manfully and doesn’t shirk,  
> Puts his best toil into his daily labour,  
> Faithful and true to God and to his neighbor,  
> That man is helping the great world along,  
> And makes his country’s life more pure and strong.¹⁴⁵

Just like the martial heroes of the past, the exemplar boy would attain greatness by exuding a Christian manliness; one devoid of personal ambition, full of obedience, hardiness, a faith in god and driven by a strong work ethic. However, the ultimate benefactor of these normative behaviors is not the individual, but Great Britain. In other words, the individual is only important because he or she is part of an inherently righteous whole. Thus, this verse exemplified how the rhetoric of Empire Day subverted the personal desires of the individual to the needs and demands of the state. What is simultaneously assumed and promoted is that the individual will want to make “his country’s life more pure and strong.” It will be

¹⁴³ Ibid, 15.  
¹⁴⁴ The prevalence of these martial values will be examined in chapter 3.  
¹⁴⁵ Debenham, Empire Day: A Dialogue for Children, 16.
examined below how educators created the emotional currency of patriotism—which would make the nation-state righteous—via other Empire Day rituals.

Britannia also brought the girls into this citizenship in a way that furthered the accepted differences between each gender. Upon hearing about the great role the boys would play in the empire, a girl asks Britannia, “Can’t we do anything?” To this, Britannia replies, “I rather think you’ve got the biggest part, since mothers, wives and sisters make the home.”\(^{146}\) In a discourse in which the fate of the empire rested on each individual’s character and actions, the home which molded these individuals was assigned a critical role. As one headmaster said during a “typical” Empire Day procedure, “the character of the families in the homes formed the bed-rock of Empire.”\(^{147}\) Since British culture at this time saw women as the rulers of the home, they were in turn projected as having the imperial responsibility. This belief only further exemplifies how the “cult of empire” was supposed to infiltrate into every aspect of civilians’ lives. Thus, mothers who forced their children to perform their daily chores or who punished disobedience could—although most likely did not—justify their actions in relation to service they were providing to the empire.

The martial spirit which was a necessary component for ensuring compliance was pressed upon the girls as well. For example, one song that the Empire Day Book of Patriotism deemed appropriate for them on Empire Day was entitled “I’d Like to be a Soldier or a Sailor.”\(^{148}\) Therefore, although the girls were not expected to fight (or vote for that matter), they needed to be ready to sacrifice and suffer for the empire in whatever form the state demanded, e.g., willingly letting their sons go off to war. The patriotic spirit was designed to make the

\(^{146}\) Debenham, *Empire Day: A Dialogue for Children*, 16.
\(^{147}\) *The Times*, 25 May 1907, 8.
\(^{148}\) Cowper, “Education and Imperialism”, 421.
children want to contribute to the existing order as well as readily accept any
demands placed on them by the state.

The stories, poems and plays rhetoric promoted and established a national
collective identity that revolved around “the axis of the British Empire.”

Although this ethos was present throughout the school year, Empire Day, and the
two weeks leading up to it, marked a particularly concentrated time for the spread
of this ideology. What was stressed was duty to the empire, but what it really
meant was that children should provide some kind of utility to society. Thus, the
“imperial ethos” was primarily a moral doctrine that was meant to inspire one to
fulfill his or her duties as a citizens.

This utilization of patriotism in schools marked a distinct break from the
Victorian era. During much of the 19th century, as mentioned earlier, complacency
towards the empire was the only thing required from the working classes.

In contrast, in Edwardian England, the paradigm being imparted to children was one
of active involvement in the empire. The causes of this change were highlighted in
the last chapter. In addition, one sees that educators are voluntarily accepting
nationalizing mission. This trend started after the Education Act of 1870 which
made national education mandatory. As schools became a permanent component
of the state, the individuals who ran them aimed to bolster the state which they
served.

However, this was not a product of the state requirements; according to
the historian J.H. Grainger, “[n]o English Ministry…could be said to prescribe or
regulate conceptions of the patria in day schools.”

As a result, the spread of
Empire Day and its ideals represents how many educational authorities and

150 Porter, The Absent-Minded Imperialists, 194.
151 Davin, Growing Up Poor, 85-6.
probably even more teachers believed in and what to promote this particular imperial-national identity in the children.

2e. Music, the Union Jack and the Youth

Juxtaposed against the holiday’s didactic strain was its jovial celebratory manifestations. One of the most prominent aspects of the holiday was that it substituted engaging activities such as singing for the usual repetitiveness of the school syllabus. As one student born in 1899 remembers 99 years later, “they would have this big day, Empire Day, and it was such an exciting day, they dress the streets up with flags and they’d cross them all across the street. And we went to school….Going to school for a few days before this, we were learning all sorts of things, you know, new songs.” Indeed, for the children, Empire Day was a chance to sing glorifying songs, wave flags, and perform in dances or plays which would be capped off by a half-holiday from school; adding to its festive nature, teachers or other organizers of Empire Day celebrations commonly doled out treats such as chocolates, buns or tea to the children. This demonstrates how educators were not trying to “teach” patriotism, but rather inspire or emot it by engaging the children in a variety of activities.

However, such procedures were not incongruous with the message behind Empire Day. By romanticizing conceptions of empire, the holiday assisted in the proper indoctrination of the children. As Robert Roberts, a working-class boy who grew up in Edwardian Manchester noted in his memoir, although his classmates and he did not know “whether trade was good for the Empire, or the Empire was good for trade, they knew the Empire was theirs and they were going

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155 Bloomfield, “Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism,” 75.
to support it.” Thus, in order to inspire future duty, educators did not impart to them the reality of the empire – e.g., the functioning of its political economy – but rather the idealism of the empire. In other words, by constructing the empire as a righteous ideal and self-evident cause, educators hoped to induce every individual to want to maintain it.

From the beginning, music was fundamental to celebrations of Empire Day. Edwardians considered it a vital emotional force which would stir patriotic sentiments and the duty that were attached to them. Lord Meath even had his “Empire Day Catechisms”, a series of questions and answers based on his watchwords of “responsibility, duty, sympathy, self-sacrifice”, be set to music and distributed in pamphlets. Or as one Londoner wrote to The Times:

If London and our larger towns could get up on the morning of May 24 to the accompaniment of national music played I am sure that the inner meaning of that day would be driven home to thousands of people who in the ordinary rush of their lives would otherwise overlook it.

In fact, singing accompanied every school yard demonstration as well as public performance. Notably, in oral recollections people constantly mentioned the singing of patriotic songs. "We used to sing our heads off," on May 24th one Lancashire weaver fondly remembered. In fact, even after 98 years, some interviewees felt inspired enough to share a couple of verses of either “Rule Britannia” and “Flag of Britain.”

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159 Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 120.
160 Dorothy Maria Lutner. (b. 1899) and Lucy Reeder (b. 1900), Millennium Memory Bank, 1998. Oral Testimony.
The songs, except for perhaps the verses provided by Lord Meath, represented the least pedantic and the most celebratory aspect of the Empire Day ceremony. However, they still propagated the imperial ethos by inspiring patriotism as well as celebrating sacrifice of fallen war heroes. Accordingly, the words of many of these songs almost always referred to the greatness of Great Britain (usually England more specifically) and its past deeds. For example, “Our Island Home”, “The Land of Hope and Glory”, “Rule Britannia” and of course the National Anthem were fixtures of the celebrations that exemplified this self-congratulatory tone. One such song entitled, “The Meaning of Empire Day,” was performed by 30,000 children to King George IV in 1914. Not only is it patriotic, but remarkably militaristic. As the children sung:

What is the meaning of Empire Day?
Why do the cannons roar?
Why does the cry, ‘God save the King!
Echo from shore to shore.”

Réponse
On our nation’s scroll of glory,
With its deeds of daring told,
There is written a story,
Of the heroes bold,
In the days of old,
So to keep the deeds before,
Every we homage pay
To our banner proud,
That has never bowed,
And that’s the meaning of Empire Day.

In this song, there is no mention of the colonies or of the diversity of the various nations. Instead, it is about having pride in Great Britain, its accomplishments and the heroes that have made it great. Also, the song aimed to incorporate the children into the righteous narrative of the British empire (“On our nation’s scroll of glory”). Furthermore, such songs, although perhaps lacking content, were used

161 The Times, 29 May 1911, 4.
in conjunction with lesson plans about the empire and speeches about the responsibility children had to it. Thus, learning about their daily duties – on Empire Day and throughout the school-year – provided the message, while singing songs about the greatness of England provided the reason – i.e. patriotism – to adhere to that message.

The most omnipresent and in some regards, the most important symbol of Empire Day was the Union Jack. In many photographs and newspaper reports, “a liberal display of bunting” is one of the most salient features. As the Daily Express reported that in London in 1909, the Union Jack “flew from nearly every building.”\(^{163}\) Indeed, throughout England, a vast array of municipal buildings, churches, schools and private homes donned the Union Jack on this national holiday.\(^{164}\) Most revealing about the flag’s centrality to the holiday is the fact that the Parliamentary debate about the official sanctioning of the holiday revolved around the issue of raising the Union Jack every May 24\(^{th}\).

Today, flag-waving seems to be a requisite and even perfunctory function of any national celebration. However, in the Edwardian period, the Union Jack was not an established and therefore clichéd national symbol. It was not until 1908 that the Union Jack was officially sanctioned as the national flag.\(^{165}\) Before then, in letters to The Times, there was an ongoing debate about which flags should be flown, on what occasions, and by whom.\(^{166}\) As a result of its relative novelty, there seemed to be a good deal of ignorance about its appearance and usage. In 1907, The Times printed a story of how in one (Radical) unnamed rural village, the police mistakenly mistook the Union Jack for a royal standard and thus

\(^{163}\) Daily Express, 25 May 1909, 1.
\(^{164}\) The Times, 25 May 1907, 8.
\(^{166}\) Ibid., 251.
confiscated it.\textsuperscript{167} Even in 1914, Lord Meath was concerned enough to write a letter to the press to remind Britons that it was the Union Jack, not the royal standard, the red ensign, or the tri-colors of the French national flag, which should be flown on Empire Day.\textsuperscript{168}

In response to the ignorance and in hopes of establishing a new national symbol (and ethos that it represented), educators and imperialists made a concerted effort to use Empire Day to help this national symbol gain prominence. At this time, educators and imperialists “developed a mystical reverence for the flag.”\textsuperscript{169} In addition to the image of the Monarch, the flag became the main edifying symbol which was to embody the greatness of the British Empire and the Britons who made and maintained it. Consequently, related to the rise of Empire Day was a rise in the number of schools that gained a flagstaff to hang “this elementary means of fostering a sense of patriotism.”\textsuperscript{170} The School Government Chronicle noted that because of “private generosity and enthusiasm [by unanimous donors]” many schools throughout England were given an “interesting souvenir, in the shape of a flagstaff and a Union Jack.”\textsuperscript{171} These campaigns were so successful, at least in London, that by 1908, “there was hardly a school without a flag.”\textsuperscript{172}

As the physical embodiment of the nation, educators hoped that the flag’s presence on Empire Day and throughout the school year would remind children everyday of their duties to it. As one correspondence for The Times lamented,

\textsuperscript{167} The Times, 6 April 1907, 11. The Royal Standard was the flag of the king and was only allowed to be flown by places explicitly sanctioned by the king.
\textsuperscript{168} The Manchester Guardian, 19 May 1914, 7.
\textsuperscript{170} The Times, 24 May 1907, 7.
\textsuperscript{171} School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 77 (1907), 471.
\textsuperscript{172} The Times, 23 May 1908, 11.
respect “for the flag is not taught as it is in the United States and in many parts of
the Empire outside the United Kingdom.”\textsuperscript{173} As a result, educators explicitly
attempted to give the flag a specific meaning which the children could understand.
For example, the London Education Committee decided that from 1908 onwards,
it was required to give speeches or address the “deeper meaning” of the flag on
Empire Day.\textsuperscript{174}

According to the Empire Day Catechism the flag was called the Union
Jack because it represented the “union of the English, Scottish, and Irish national
ensigns or jacks, and of the crosses of St. George, St. Andrew, and St. Patrick.”\textsuperscript{175}
However, it was not only a symbol which stood for the unity of the empire in
general or for the unity of the United Kingdom in particular. It also represented,
according to the school literature that children encountered, “a sense of belonging
and loyalty to their nation and the empire…” and more importantly “with the
values that had made them ‘great.’”\textsuperscript{176} Thus, educators utilized the flag to overtly
proselytize for a specific code of conduct. The specifics of this probity were part
of the imperial ethos that infused the songs, poetry and other aspects of Empire
Day. The interconnectedness of emotion and duty in the symbol of the flag was
demonstrated by a speech made by Lord Rosebery in 1908 – a Liberal Imperialist
much committed to increasing Britain’s national efficiency. In the speech, he
treated the Union Jack as a sacred and inspiring symbol whose mere presence
would maintain a child’s daily commitment to the “empire.” In fact, his speech

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 13 April, 1907, 6.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 24 May 1908, 8.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 30 May 1906, 12.
\textsuperscript{176} Heathorn, \textit{For Home, Country, and Race}, 191.
was so poignant that in 1909, the LCC sent a circular to all schools under its jurisdiction which contained an extract of a speech on the Union Jack.\textsuperscript{177}

As Lord Rosebery told the children in 1908, wherever one was to find the Union Jack flying there was “liberty, justice, good government, [and] equal dealing between man and man.”\textsuperscript{178} But, as he reminded the students, British children could not merely wave the flag and assume that all the greatness it embodied would come to them. The entire point of his speech was to remind the children that its meaning must be preserved through active participation. In alignment with the aforementioned Empire Day dialogue, Lord Rosebery told the boys that they should join the professional Expeditionary Army, or at the very least, the domestic Territorial Army.\textsuperscript{179} In addition, girls, although not asked to fight or vote, were expected to suffer for the flag if the country needed them. Nonetheless, the empire was such a noble thing, as Lord Rosebery reminds the children, that the “suffering would be worth it.”\textsuperscript{180}

However, like the poems and plays, the flag was not all about the military. Lord Rosebery reminded the children that, first and foremost, they could “all serve the flag by being good citizens and good citizenesses by allowing nothing in [their] conduct to disparage or lessen the character of the nation to which [they] belong.” Thus, the focus of being a good citizen was not necessarily on traveling throughout the empire, but on each individual’s limited life. Indeed, serving the empire simply meant paying taxes, voting, or “serv[ing] on all sorts of local

\textsuperscript{177} School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 81 (1909), 411. The speech was on the Union Jack and given at Edinburgh on 22\textsuperscript{nd} February, 1908.
\textsuperscript{178} Archibald Philip Primrose Rosebery, The Union Jack and Its Meaning (Edinburgh: Merchant Company, 1911),4. This is a reprint of the same speech which was made in honor of the coronation ceremony of that year.
\textsuperscript{179} The Territorial Army was established in 1908 by an act of the War Office. They were a centralized version of the home-based Yeomanry and Volunteers that preceded them. Although the Territorial Army could be deployed to the empire, its main focus was home defense. G.R. Searle, \textit{A New England?: Peace and War 1886-1918} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 491-2.
\textsuperscript{180}Rosebery, \textit{The Union Jack and Its Meaning}, 3.
assemblies”; there was in fact “a hundred ways to promote the common good.” Thus, although framed as “duty” and “responsibility,” they were essentially being told to comply with the law and contribute to the functioning of the nation-state.\footnote{Ibid., 6.}

The ideal of the Union Jack was circular; not only did it require active participation in order for its meaning to be maintained, but also its very presence was so powerful that it inspired said participation. As Lord Rosebery said, the mere sight of the Union Jack reminded the children that they were “citizens of the greatest Empire.” Lord Rosebery called it an “inspiration” – “something that seems to come from above, higher and better than [one’s self]” – and thereby would “make [the British children] higher and better than [they] usually [were].” Accordingly, Lord Rosebery concluded his speech by reminding the children that if they ever tempted “to do something mean, or base, or vile, or cowardly” they must “look up to that flag and forbear.”\footnote{Ibid., 6.} Thus, this speech revealed how intertwined imperial patriotism and the symbols that substantiated it were to the propagation of the specific code of conduct promoted on Empire Day.

Accordingly, the flag was an essential part to any Empire Day celebration. Union Jacks were handed out to children and hung from many public and private buildings. Indeed, it was an integral symbol to the expression of patriotism on Empire Day. As will be examined in the next chapter, the ideology behind the flag was reinforced by procedures such as marching past the flag or saluting it. Frequently, educators had children assembled into “living Union Jacks”, a ceremony that involved the strict coordination of many pupils.\footnote{Bloomfield, “Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism,” 76.} These exercises required students to act out the discipline, uniformity and individual self-sacrifice that Lord Meath and other imperialists so eminently desired. Such symbolic
gestures would help children absorb the message and in turn, it was hoped, lead to a longer lasting empire.

2f. Conclusion

Empire Day was a day for speeches, poems, songs and ceremonies that all worked in tandem to provide a code of conduct whose internalization was directly made possible by patriotism. Thus, educators used Empire Day to further the year-long object of schooling, i.e., as Anna Davin put it, “to ensure that the next generation met the needs of the modern nation-state.”184 As shown above, the national narrative that children were given emphasized that they were members of a broader collective. However, more importantly, the message stressed that with this sacred privilege of membership came sacred responsibilities. The essence of this responsibility was ensuring that one is useful and compliant to the state. Educators thereby hoped to use the patriotism and enthusiasm of Empire Day to directly benefit the nation-state to which they too belonged.

However, it was not just obedience, harmony, and good behavior that Empire Day called for, but a discipline and willingness to sacrifice one’s self to the empire. A popular conservative response – one that was distinctly promoted by Lord Meath and his Spartan ideology – was that an inculcation of martial values into the British society was the only thing that would enable the society to defend itself against external acts or internal subversion.185 This was accompanied by the poems, songs and speeches that exalted soldiers to fight for the empire. In addition, although the rituals of the school program were rather innocuous, the

184 Davin, Growing Up Poor, 215.
public ceremonies were much more martial in character. The following chapter will examine the presence of militarism in Edwardian society on Empire Day.
Chapter 3: Imperial Pageantry: Merriment and Militarism

The immediate years following the scramble for Africa and the Boer War demonstrated for many Edwardians that force was necessary to maintain their empire. Unsurprisingly, imperial patriotism commonly evoked pride and recognition of the military which provided that force. This chapter will examine how the military and its virtues figured, or were absent, in the various manifestations of Empire Day. Indeed, the popularity of the martial spirit and appropriated military demonstrations in some parts of England suggest that popular militarism infiltrated civil society to a significant extent.\textsuperscript{186}

As suggested in the previous chapter, in teaching children about the growth, i.e., the conquest, of the empire, educators also promoted a series of martial values – sacrifice and discipline. However, it was still part of the larger socializing process which intended to produce useful citizens. In contrast, many of the larger public spectacles not only adulated such military virtues, but also emulated military rituals such as rifle shooting competitions, drill and uniformed marching. Although these ceremonies were still performed under the auspices of moral training, they were a supremely militaristic expression of the holiday that meant primarily to prepare the next generation of soldiers.

At the same time, although martial components of society surfaced during the holiday, there was also a strong counterpoint provided by many educational authorities, teachers and MPs. Anti-jingoism was a popular sentiment among the individuals who were weary of inculcating militant values into the children.

\textsuperscript{186} Geoffrey Best, in his study on Public Schools, gives three definitions of militarism. It can mean ‘the prevalence of military sentiments or ideal among a people’, ‘the predominance of the military class in government and administration’ or the ‘the tendency to regard military efficiency as the paramount interest of the state.’ Best, “Militarism and the Victorian Public School,” 138. This chapter will rely predominately on the first definition – the popularity of martial values – in its assessment.
Accordingly, they attempted to ensure that the celebrations remained primarily civilian and innocuous in character. In addition, Empire Day celebrations were frequently only a chance for children to sing songs and then receive candy. The lack of explicit aggressiveness or militarism in the most common expression of Empire Day testifies to its mainstream function, which was primarily to inculcate feelings of pride and civic duty to the nation-state and to its empire.

3a. A Martial Spirit in Schools

During this time and for several decades before and after, the history of England was the history of the empire and the military which made it. This specific narrative was reflected and reinforced by Sir John Seeley’s widely popular work, *The Expansion of England* (1883). Seeley’s work was a response to the mid-Victorian conception of English history in which the empire only had a peripheral part. Thereby, one sees how as the formal empire started to expand in unprecedented leaps in Africa in the 1880s, the focus of the national narrative thereby shifted to accommodate as well as justify this “new imperialism.” In textbooks, school readers and popular children’s literature the history of England became one of continual empire-building. Fundamental to this growth was the courageous army, invincible navy and the actions of other indomitable explorers. Accordingly, the archetypal national hero became a military figure who had fought for Great Britain overseas.187

The lessons recommended by the Empire Day Book of Patriotism (1912) supported this “new” national history. For example, the book instructed that the history taught on Empire Day should be about “the lives of eminent historical

personages, such as Raleigh, Clive, Wolfe, Nelson, Wellington, Marlborough, Sir Philip Sidney, Gordon… Cecil Rhodes, Lord Roberts”, all of whom were military heroes or adventurers. The other option for the lesson plan was “great events in our national and imperial history” – which all happen to be military conflicts. This fact also highlights the anglo-centricity of this holiday. For educators and children, Empire Day was not an occasion to learn about the different cultures of the empire, but rather celebrate the superiority of the men who conquered those various cultures and climates.

In addition, the rhetoric of Empire Day, which revolved around the notions of responsibility to the empire, brought the martial spirit as well as the stories of the military to the fore. In celebrating predominately male heroes with primarily manly virtues, the tone of this citizenship was markedly masculine. This language did not mean that women could not be good patriots; as discussed in the previous chapter, motherhood took on a distinctly imperial role. However, such an example revealed the values that Edwardians deemed important for the maintenance of their society.

Not only did the contents of the lessons celebrate the army, but also some of the typical school-yard procedures were appropriated, yet diluted military practices. Most notably, from at least 1907 onwards, the typical celebration in London and many other boroughs ended with a “march-past” and a formal salute the flag. A “march-past” is a maneuver in which the troops march by a commanding officer that inspects them. As a result, the austerity of this “march-past” probably greatly varied depending on the temperament of the school master.

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188 Cowper, “Education and Imperialism,” 418-9. Although not all the heroes mentioned were soldiers, a majority were involved with war or conquest in some way. Many, but not all of the events were colonial. Some of the events included the battle of Trafalgar (1807), the Crimean War (1853-6), the First Boer War (1881), and the war against Afghanistan (1878).

189 School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 71 (1907), 481.
 Nonetheless, it was a ritualized review of the children whose function was to ensure obedience and uniformity of step. Also, the formal salute of the flag, promoted by the Empire Day Movement and accepted in schools, was also quasi-military in character. Figure 1 shows a large group of children, none more than seven years old, holding their hand to their forehead in a typical salute. The picture is from a school under the London County Council at Kennington in 1909.

**Figure 1**


One way to assess the prevalence of militarism is by gauging the acceptance of the typical military virtues such as discipline, self-sacrifice and honor among the civilian population. In state schools, the promotion of this set of values was quite common. To begin with, the stories of military heroes constructed a national narrative founded on courage and promoted the ideal Briton sacrificing their personal well-being for the nation at large. Furthermore, the march-past and the formal salute of the flag were participatory rituals whose
function was to instill in the children the importance of discipline to this imperial citizenship.

However, such lesson plans and actions did not inherently promote an aggressive or self-aggrandizing attitude. Instead, they asserted the primacy of the nation-state over the needs of the individual as a way to reinforce the central values of the day, namely, sacrifice, duty, and responsibility to the collective. This ideal is embodied in the rituals of the holiday such as the military salute demonstrated in Figure 1. This symbolic action served a deeper purpose by unifying all individuals in a single moment of reverence and recognition to the nation-state. Although the salute is brief, it attests to educators’ attempts to instill an *esprit de corps* in the children. The actions such as saluting and marching in uniform were representative of the collectivism promoted on that day; a concept which aimed to unite all in an unending service to the “common good.” Thus, the object of the affections is not necessarily the military, but the nation and the empire itself. This is an important distinction to recognize in schools, for as will be shown below, the distinction between the army and the empire become blurred by some of the larger spectacles.

Furthermore, on Empire Day in schools, the military and the empire it supposedly built was just as much a reflection as an engine of British greatness. In other words, what really made the empire and what would really keep the empire was above all a set of moral virtues; virtues which could be displayed in both peace and war. Accordingly, the message that educators imparted to the children was that joining the military was not a prerequisite to serve the empire; as demonstrated in the last chapter, one could support the nation-state and the empire in a myriad of other local and peaceful ways. This was most likely a response to
the fears of moral degeneration that seemed to stricken Edwardian society. The core of the school ceremony remained citizen training that was directed at ensuring that the future workforce of Great Britain would be industrious and obedient.

3b. Imperial Parades, the Military and the Youth

In the larger imperial celebrations held outside school grounds, the distinction between citizen training and soldier training became less clear. Many of these public ceremonies required children to watch or to perform specific military rituals and maneuvers. Although such processions did not imitate the actual conditions of being in the military, their function was to promote the ideal that the soldier was the foundation of the empire and Great Britain. In other words, parades by both the Territorial Army and uniformed youth groups were intended to imbue children with a mentality which connected pride in Great Britain with a desire to support its armed forces. Accordingly, the character of this imperial patriotism aimed to induce the participating children not only to be useful to the nation-state, but also to want to fight and die for the state.

Newspaper reports suggest that across England, Empire Day was deemed an appropriate time by the regiments of the Territorial Army to hold parades. In London and in other counties in 1909, there were over 80 parades of Territorials on the Sunday before Empire Day. One such example occurred in Congleton, in which the school children were placed under a large Union Jack while the
volunteer soldiers marched past, saluted and then fired volleys.\textsuperscript{193} Such procedures explicitly connected the military with the feelings of pride in the empire elicited on that day. For the children singing the songs in praise of the empire and listening to speeches about one’s duty to it in conjunction with watching the army march on the same day, the message must have been clear. If one wanted to exercise imperial citizenship, then one should volunteer or at least be involved with Britain’s military. There were other kinds of demonstrations that required children to participate, which also elevated the importance of the military to this imperial identity.

Although many of the parades did not necessarily teach children the skills necessary for war, they still promoted a martial mentality by having children perform very militaristic procedures. One such example of this large-scale spectacle took place in Liverpool in 1908. The event was so massive that it was held in the stadium of the Everton Football Club. As the \textit{Manchester Guardian} reported:

\begin{quote}
There was a rhythmically executed drill displayed by 1,120 boys and girls in red, white, and blue costumes, who were marched into position by fifty drummers, buglers, and trumpeters from the Seaforth Barracks. At the conclusion of the drill the boys and girls formed themselves into a massive Union Jack, and sang “The Red, White, and Blue.”\textsuperscript{194}
\end{quote}

Although the ceremony was replete with patriotic emblems such as the Union Jack and songs, it lacked any direct reference to the empire. Instead, patriotism was to be reflected and promoted through repetitive physical exercises and highly uniform movements. In order to properly perform the drills and form the living Union Jack, children had to be disciplined, willing to sacrifice their desires to a

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{The Manchester Guardian}, 25 May 1909, 8.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 25 May 1908, 10.
larger body and have a certain level of physical fitness. What this procession meant to instill in children was a certain frame of mind which was highly regimented, disciplined and founded on self-abnegation and sacrifice.

The Dean of Canterbury claimed on Empire Day in 1908 that every boy should join the Territorial Army. He justified such a request not by saying Britain’s army needed more men, but rather that “military discipline… contained within itself some of the highest moral training that a nation could possibly have.” Thus, promoting martial values as well as military training was justified in terms of strengthening the moral integrity of the British population. The fact that joining the army was promoted on such moral grounds is a direct reflection of the fears of internal degeneration that were omnipresent among the more conservative members of society. However, at the same time, in promoting this military mentality, many conservative imperialists made the distinction between character training and preparing the future soldiers of the empire disappear completely.

Although framed as such, the desire to increase the size of the army was not intended for the sake of the citizens. The conservative attitude believed strongly in preparation for the next war or conflict. For example, although the editors of The Times in the Empire Day edition in 1909 denounced the “fierce competition in armaments which [was] weighing more and more heavily upon the leading nations every year”, they still believed that “ever greater and greater armaments [were] the condition of national security.” As a result, the country was forced to use “every resource at [its] command to maintain [its] present advantage.

195 Bloomfield, “Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism,” 82.
196 The Times, 23 May 1908, 11.
The annual Empire Day Parade through London which started in 1909 exemplified an expression of this quintessential pre-World War I paradigm. The parade aimed to strengthen Great Britain not by increasing armaments, but by militarizing the mentality of the citizenry, especially the youth, and thus making them better soldiers when the time came.

The whole procession, held on the closest Saturday to Empire Day, would traverse through central London before concluding in Hyde Park with a military review. The organizer of the event was the League of the Empire, an interest group that used education to promote imperial unity, and sponsored by Lord Meath and his Empire Day Movement. The inaugural parade was comprised of 4,000 boys in uniform, 2,000 other children not in uniform, hundreds of flags, nearly twenty bands, and most notably, several machine guns. Many of the more military-looking youth groups participated including 500 National Naval Cadets and the Newport Market Military School. However, the organizers of other, less explicitly militaristic groups such as the Jewish Orphan Asylum and the District Messengers also deemed it appropriate to don uniforms and march alongside the machine guns on Empire Day. Such a demonstration represented serious attempts by conservative groups to familiarize the children with both the maneuvers and the apparatuses of the army; in fact, the distinctions between soldier and civilian were blurred by the ceremonies.

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197 Ibid., 24 May 1909, 13.
198 Greenlee, *Education and Imperial Unity, 1901-1926*, 12, 61.
199 *The Observer*, 23 May 1909, 13. This entire procedure was not a disorganized conglomerate of thousands of screaming and singing children. *The Times* noted: "[The children’s] marching was wonderfully good, and their physique, especially in the cases of the uniformed boys…was such as to encourage optimism with regard to the future physique of British citizens…[and] hardly a boy or a girl fell out of ranks." *The Times*, 25 May 1909, 8.
Once the children arrived in Hyde Park, they performed a highly organized and symbolic trooping of the colors. In this ceremony, “the colors” were the 56 colonial flags of the empire which were displayed in a variety of rehearsed movements meant to symbolize the unity of the empire. For example, one of the flag movements in the 1911 version of the parade was meant to represent Britannia in danger. On a specific signal, those bearing the 56 colonial flags “formed a hallow square around the Union Jack” and raised them, according to the League of the Empire’s report, “like so many bayonets surrounding and protecting it.” After the demonstrations ended, the entire procession marched-past Lord Roberts, the retired Field Marshall and the most revered living hero of the empire, for inspection.

In order for the trooping of the colors and the march-past to be successful, the organizers of the ceremony had to ensure that hundreds of children were tightly synchronized with each other and to the music provided by the military tattoos. Consequently, these processions did not inherently promote warmongering, but rather aimed to instill the virtues of discipline, duty, and sacrifice that constituted a good soldier or a good citizen. Therefore, it was through symbolic actions and rituals that the ideals of the imperial ethos were to be embodied and potentially absorbed. In Figure 2, even the Church Nursing Brigade, hardly a militaristic company, organized themselves in tight rows as they

200 Robert Giddings, “Delusive Seduction: Pride, Pomp, Circumstance and Military Music” in *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, 30-32. Stemming from the 18th century, this military maneuver was originally intended to train troops how to recognize the movements of their unit via color coordination.


202 Lord Roberts was the most famous soldier in Great Britain and was seen as the figure who turned around the Boer War when the British were losing. After he retired from the army upon his return from South Africa, he became an active advocate of mandatory military training. Incorporating one of the most respected soldiers in British history into the ceremony emphasizes its connection to the military. R.J.Q. Adams, “Field-Marshal Earl Roberts: Army and Empire,” in *Edwardian Conservatism: Five Studies in Adaptation*, ed. J.A. Thompson and Arthur Mejia (London: Croom Helm, 1988).
marched past and saluted Lord Roberts in 1913. The picture reveals how pervasively and literally the military spirit could manifest itself on Empire Day.

**Figure 2**

![Empire Day Review in Hyde Park](image)

Source: *The Daily Mail*, 26 May 1913, 8.

Such rituals were meant to inculcate in the nurses and children a mindset in which they would their lives in a very patriotic and disciplined manner. However, not only did the form of the rituals mimic the military, but also its contents promoted an acceptance of the function of the military. The marching of boys with machine guns and the presence of Territorial Army parades suggest that the values promoted on Empire Day were not merely for citizen training, but more importantly, readying future soldiers. Furthermore, the symbolism of the trooping of the colors dealt with the empire being under attack and defending itself. Thus, although very few were advocating war at this time, it seems that many wanted its citizens to be prepared for it both physically and mentally for when it would come. This ‘preparation’ was achieved by active participation in military performances or demonstrations. In addition, this connection between patriotism and the military is best exemplified by the rifle-shooting competitions which were quite popular on Empire Day.
3c. Rifle-Shooting Competitions: Citizen or Soldier Training?

From the beginning, Empire Day was not a celebration of the diversity of the disparate parts of the empire, but rather a celebration of the instrument – the army and its rifles – which made it possible. From newspaper reports, it seems that rifle competitions were quite common, or at the very least well-reported during the pre-war years. For example, the imperialist newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, founded its own Empire Day Rifle Contest in 1906. It quickly became so widespread that literally hundreds of rifle clubs from within Great Britain and across the dominions had to cable in their scores. At the same time, this is not to overstate the prominence of rifle shooting competitions; team sport was still the main attraction for children and adults. Nevertheless, what it represents is how pride in the nation-state would not only inspire children to fulfill their civic duty, but also to take up arms and learn how to shoot in case the empire ever needed them to do so.

Organizers of the rifle-shooting competitions, which were usually local townspeople and Territorial regiments, held rifle-shooting competitions for the older children as well. Indeed, in Woolwich, a suburb of South-east London, Empire Day in 1907 was celebrated by the “establishment of a rifle club for boys between the ages of 12 and 17, on the lines suggested by Lord Roberts.” In 1908, Lord Meath started his own annual competition in connection with Empire Day called the “The Meath Trophy for British School Boys.” However, it was the Empire Day competition sponsored by Lord Roberts that was perhaps the most prestigious of them all. In 1909, the boy with the best marksmanship in this

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203 *The Daily Mail*, 26 May 1911, 6. The competition was deemed important enough that both *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* gave brief reports or updates on the results for days after the competition.
204 *The Times*, 20 May 1907, 12.
205 Ibid, 25 April 1908, 8.
competition was even presented with a gold medal by the Princess of Wales in front of an entire auditorium – the Queen’s Hall – before the start of the Empire Day concert. This reveals an acceptance of not only military virtues, but also military skills in mainstream Edwardian society. In this instance, having good aim was so prized by society that it actually brought public esteem.

It was Lord Strathcona, the “grand old men of imperial circles” and the first president of the League of the Empire, who perhaps best summarized the connection between shooting, the empire and citizenship. “The boys, in training themselves to shoot,” he said to at the end of a shooting competition on Empire Day, “educated their faculties and made themselves not only better citizens but more worthy to defend the Empire.” Given widespread fears about internal degeneration and an increasingly menacing international playing field, many imperialists emphasized the necessity of some form of military training. Such a training promoted discipline which would remedy the internal degeneration as well as provide to British children the skills to fight potential enemies. From this, one can see that marksmanship with a rifle was a celebrated feature of Edwardian patriotism not because of the discipline it gave to the boys, but more importantly, because it taught them to be better soldiers. In the decade after the Great War, a time in which Empire Day was more somber and pacifist, rifle-shooting competitions were completely absent from newspaper reports. Their absence in a war-weary Britain attested to the fact that the skills gained by rifle-shooting were meant to be applied in one place: on the battlefield.

206 School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 81 (1909), 443.
207 The Times, 16 June 1909, 9.
208 There is not one instant of rifle shooting competitions on Empire Day in The Times after May 1918.
3d. Peacemongering on Empire Day

The martial spirit fostered on the day could become bellicose, but more often it was defensive and antipathetic to war. Lord Meath even claimed during the inaugural celebration of Empire Day that his overarching objective was “to live in peace and amity with the whole world.”\textsuperscript{209} Similarly, to the educational authorities that supported the holiday, it was supposed to be about peace and unity. As one Empire Day circular issued to the schools from the LCC noted, the “[c]hildren should be made to feel that this great Empire is a union for peace and defense and not for aggression and aggrandizement.”\textsuperscript{210} The support of educational authorities who were simultaneously wary of aggressive attitudes revealed that Empire Day was not inherently incompatible with a less aggressive attitude. This was because, as will be demonstrated below, the holiday was above all a national celebration of Great Britain and its people which could manifest itself in any way its organizers saw appropriate. At the same time, the nature of the holiday, i.e., lauding an empire, was susceptible to an emphasis on military domination or aggression.

Although the above ceremonies suggest that Empire Day was used to prepare children to fight the next war, it also used in attempts to prevent the next war from ever occurring. Indeed, some educators saw Empire Day as the perfect day to combat the hostile tendencies against Germany that seemed to be growing each day. In one school in Hampstead, a letter was read specifically for Empire Day that emphasized that the “the British Empire and the German Empire [were] brothers;” the reasons being that they both praised the same god and had never

\textsuperscript{209} \textit{The Times}, 25 May 1904, 4.

fought each before. Bernard Porter noted that Empire Day was used in towns, especially where the Labour party was strongest, as the perfect time to give speeches about international peace. Furthermore, in 1914, the school authorities in London and other places across England merged Peace Day, a separate and obviously short-lived holiday planned for May 16th, with the celebration of Empire Day on the 24th. Thus, this peacemongering on Empire Day was not a preserve of a few radicals or religious groups, but a tone taken by larger parts of society.

In addition, one could be in favor of Empire Day without necessarily being in favor of the military displays on the holiday. As mentioned above, although certain elements of the school celebration were appropriated military practices, on the whole, the holiday was not concerned with the military or with war. The educational authority of the LCC, the largest in the country, was wary of what an imperial celebration could promote. During the debate in 1907 to decide whether or not to sanction the holiday, the more liberal members stated that “they wanted it to be a day of widespread celebration, but they desired that it should set forth the love and affection of a great Empire, and not be made a day of military display.” Indeed, the committee eventually agreed that that “there would be no bombastic or jingo language used, and there would be no display of a military character.” Thus, the holiday did not have to be an assertion of Britain’s military superiority via a demonstration of its guns or forces. This revealed competing views within Edwardian society of Britain’s imperial position; for

211 The Manchester Guardian, 29 May 1914, 5.
213 The Manchester Guardian, 24 April 1914, 12.
214 School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 77 (1907), 420.
215 Ibid.
example, while imperialists believed that holiday would serve one function, educators could use the holiday to promote a different cause.

The willingness to support Empire Day while being fearful of military displays embodies what one historian referred to as the “peculiar sort of popular militarism” that permeated Edwardian England.216 Educational authorities were in line with the conservative imperialists in the belief that responsibility to the empire was the focus of the holiday. As a result, both groups supported, albeit to varying degrees, the notions of citizenship which were founded on martial virtues such as discipline and sacrifice. Also, everyone who accepted the holiday saw it as a chance to celebrate the accomplishments of the British nation-state. On one hand however, certain groups in Great Britain were more aggressive in tone and accordingly idealized the military to promote their ideology. On the other hand, after the Boer War and as European conflict became more likely, a large component of British society did not wish to promote any aggressive or warmongering sentiments. Thus, many educational authorities and the teachers feared the political implications of having any kind of military displays.

The reaction of the Liberal government to the military displays that occurred on Empire Day revealed how cautious people were of promoting jingoism on the holiday.217 As the demonstrations grew larger and more militaristic, the governing party became vigilant in curbing displays of a military nature. They were most concerned about keeping the professional army – a distinct group from the Territorial Army that was usually deployed throughout the empire – out of the celebration. In fact, in 1909 and thereafter, the Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, banned the Harrow School contingent of the

217 The Parliamentary debates about the holiday will be examined more fully in Chapter 4.
Officers’ Training Corps (OTC) from marching in uniform in the parade, explaining that the OTC, “was part of the Army and thus subject to the same conditions as apply to the Army.”\textsuperscript{218} At this time, the King’s Regulation specifically ordered the occasions on which Army uniforms could be worn; this novel holiday did not make it onto the list. The logic held through even until the year before the Great War. The new Secretary of State for War, Major-General John Seely, similarly banned the Marlborough College contingent of the OTC in 1913. As he said, “Empire Day celebrations in this country are occasions for civilian rejoicing and are not military in character…. If members of the Officers' Training Corps desire to take part in Empire Day celebrations it is proper for them to do so in their civilian character and not as soldiers.”\textsuperscript{219} Thus, at this time, the Liberal leaders did not believe that patriotism should be expressed by wearing the King’s uniform and parading down the street.

This is not to say that the government was not fearful of military parades in general, for they occurred in the country on a number of occasions throughout the year. For example, massive military parades typically occurred on the King’s Birthday and during the Lord Mayor’s Show in London. The volume of soldiers, artillery, and other weaponry displayed on those days dwarfed even the Hyde Park procession.\textsuperscript{220} What concerned the Liberal MPs was connecting pride in the empire with the military. The government and many others thereby were downright fearful of provoking enthusiasm for further colonial or European conflicts. Indeed, sometimes these misgivings about the holiday turned into all-out protests, which will be examined more in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{218} Richard Haldane, 17 May 1909, \textit{Hansard’s Parliamentary Debate}, vol. 5, Commons, col. 844.  
\textsuperscript{219} John Seeley, 29 April 1913, Ibid., vol. 52, col 698.  
\textsuperscript{220} \textit{The Times}, 5 November 1909, 4.
3e. The More Common Celebrations

According to EDM’s Empire Day Book of Patriotism in 1912, the half-holiday children had from school on May 24th or the day closest to that was figured as a “very prominent part of the observance.” This break from school was intended to reinforce the great importance of the empire; as the author stated, “children do not readily appreciate the importance of any event unless it brings a holiday in its train.” The majority of students did not spend their afternoon performing drills, uniformed marching or rifle-shooting competitions. Instead, they usually took part in more playful or innocuous activities such as dancing around the maypole, playing in organized sports or reenacting plays.

Figure 3

Source: Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 119.

Indeed, the day was not defined for most children by strict regimentation and rifles, but rather fun and excitement. Figure 3, a picture of children gathered for Empire Day at High Middleton School on May 23, 1913, demonstrates how the

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221 Cowper, “Education and Imperialism,” 417.
222 Ibid.
holiday was primarily a celebration which aimed to raise enthusiasm, not necessarily by “trooping the colors”, but merely waving the flag. Moreover, children sang songs and were frequently given goods such as chocolates, buns and mugs. Indeed, in 1907, the main Empire Day celebration in Surrey involved a parade of hundreds of children marching with Union Jacks. At the end, the children were given special “Empire cakes.”

These less tightly organized events were meant to give children positive associations with their empire and most likely with their community.

Furthermore, if a child was dressed up on Empire Day, it was usually not in military uniforms, but rather costumes. Some of the more common costumes were Britannia, Elizabethan Englishmen or even the “natives” from colonies such as India or Africa. Figure 4, which is from a school in eastern England in 1910, demonstrates the elaborateness of some of these costumes. One thing the picture reveals is the racialized conceptions of the empire during this time. In order to represent someone from India, the two children in the front had their faces painted to change the appearance of their skins. What defined the Indian was not only what they wore, such as the other children dressed as colonists from Canada or from South Africa, but also how their “race” appeared to be. In addition, it is most likely that these smiling children dressed in these costumes were not required by their teachers to perform military drills, but rather to enact a play or to march in a parade. By having children dress up as someone from India and learn about how great the British imperium, educators were bringing the empire home to the children. Furthermore, in raising imperial awareness, teaching children of the responsibilities and then capping off the holiday with fun, the educators were

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225 School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette 77 (1907), 481.
trying to indoctrinate the children by romanticizing Britain’s imperial position. From this, one sees the extent to which the empire was merely a medium through which children were taught an idealized version of their nation-state; a version that was framed in this way to make them want to commit to it.

Figure 4

![Image of children in costumes]


In 1913, an Empire Day parade through London was organized which including 1,200 elementary school children marching while waving flags. This ceremony, which was not the Hyde Park Empire Day Parade, represents how the holiday was also a day for pageantry, as opposed to military displays, that glorified the nation and aimed to instill in children pride and deference to the nation-state. The children ended the procession in Guild-hall to hear a speech by the Lord Mayor. In the Lord Mayor’s speech, he noted that “the Empire was built on the foundations of liberty, justice, honesty, skill, and industry; and it could only be maintained so long as those principles were honoured.”227 Afterwards the children sang songs, e.g., the National Anthem, “Land of Hope and Glory,” and

227 Daily Telegraph, May 24, 1913, 8.
“The Flag of Britain.” Finally, the ceremony ended with each child becoming “the delighted possessor of a bag of chocolates and other goodies.”

This example emphasizes that the focus of Empire Day was above all the ideal of the nation-state. Sometimes Empire Day demonstrations took on a more militaristic form, but overall, the holiday was not intended to be focused on the military. Instead, children were made to feel pride in their empire, through singing, parading and being given treats. At the same time, the holiday intended to create patriotic imperatives in children which inspire them to be positively contributing members of society. Also, just because many of these celebratory gatherings involved marching, banners and parades, it is not necessarily indicative of an attempt to enmesh the military and civil societies. One must remember that many working-class political demonstrations at this time were organized in a similar fashion.

Furthermore, the “foundations of the Empire” noted by the Lord Mayor were not conceived of by Edwardians as aggressive, self-aggrandizing principles. The focus on the greatness of the nation-state also stressed principles such as skill and industry which, in turn, were expected to positively contribute to said nation-state. Another speaker at this demonstration stressed that every child should be a “good citizen by teaching each to love his neighbour and to do something to make the country a little happier.” This passage, said by Lord Meath himself, reveals that the true emotions inspired by Empire Day, at least to the contemporaries experiencing them, were joy, pride and according to Anne Bloomfield, optimism.

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228 Ibid.
230 Daily Telegraph, May 24, 1913, 8.
231 Bloomfield, “Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism,” 93.
nation-state from its despotic reality to an abstract ideal; an ideal that stood for British greatness and exceptionalism and was made accessible to every English child – as long of course as they spoke English, were Christian and were “Anglo-Saxon.”

3f. Conclusion

This chapter analyzed whether children were being taught to be good citizens, good soldiers, or neither on Empire Day. Without a doubt, the more militaristic members of Edwardian society saw this patriotic holiday as a prime opportunity to prepare children for service to the empire. The demonstrations such as rifle-competitions or parades by either men or children in uniform were meant to familiarize and assimilate the children of Great Britain to a rather militaristic mentality. In a sense, the public at large was comfortable associating more martial values with pride in the empire and in the state. This is perhaps why a group of nurses felt it appropriate to march in synchronization past Lord Roberts on Empire Day.

At the same time, there were many who were downright fearful of the effects, not of the martial spirit, but of connecting pride in the empire with pride in the armed forces. Such demonstrations would not only promote the military, but also foster the public’s willingness for war. To educators, such overtly militaristic displays were seen as incompatible with their socializing mission. Nonetheless, they could still reconcile this worldview with the rhetoric of Empire Day which was inherently emotional and unifying. In addition, there were groups who flatly rejected the holiday. The following chapter will examine the reasons that many Edwardians, especially those on the far left, saw the expression of any kind of “Empire” Day as abhorrent.
Chapter Four
A “Half-Baked Holiday”: Reasons for Resisting Empire Day

According to *The Times*, in 1911 a total of 4,499,458 pupils celebrated Empire Day within the United Kingdom.\(^{232}\) In comparison, according to the census of 1911, there were around six million children, ages 4-14, in some form of school in England alone.\(^{233}\) This means that whereas many children formally celebrated, many others did not, something which is not what Lord Meath had in mind. Moreover, ignorance was probably not the only impediment to total national participation in Empire Day. As will be examined below, the idea of establishing an entirely new holiday devoted specifically to lauding the empire struck many people as inappropriate.

In Edwardian England, there were three distinct, but interrelated reasons for resisting the holiday. First, at this time, the Conservative party had monopolized an explicit “the language of imperialism;” as a result, educational authorities wished to avoid promoting the partisan message that were implied by an celebration such as “Empire Day.”\(^{234}\) Second, there were the more radical groups, especially the socialist and laborites, who opposed how the empire was administered and thus opposed to ceremonies that exalted the empire. Finally, the most prominent type of opposition to Empire Day was not directed against the empire per se, but rather to the self-aggrandizing tone and rhetoric of the holiday. Despite Lord Meath’s assurances that the holiday was meant to counteract “jingoism” and “militarism,” the idea of celebrating the empire, and the

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\(^{232}\) *The Times*, 30 April 1912, 7. Newspaper reports suggest that a large majority of these children were in England. Indeed, around 800,000 children in London alone celebrated the holiday. In addition, England comprised about 70% of the population of the United Kingdom.


imperialism which made it, intrinsically invoked the aforementioned –isms. This opposition as well as the parliamentary debate reveal that there was an apprehensive side to what historians have treated as an otherwise explicit and self-evident British ethos.

4a. Imperial Pageantry and the English Temperament

In 1908, G.K. Chesterton, the prominent and prolific English writer/satirist, in his weekly column in the Illustrated London News, commented on the curious nature of having an “Empire” Day. He believed that Empire Day, which was promoted by the Daily Jingo, was a foolish idea because it was antithetical to the English national character.  

“The typical English feeling,” he wrote, “the psychological fact which foreigners feel about is, is our embarrassment, our shyness, in the presence of anything earnest and pompous.”

It is this reticence – a national characteristic conveniently ignored by imperialists – combined with a well-developed sense of ironic humor that will “always be hard nuts to crack for anyone who wants to establish, with entire solemnity, and on the spur of the moment, a thing like “Empire Day.”

Chesterton is not alone in attributing this psychological factor as a barrier to Empire Day. Even The Times, a newspaper committed to the propagation of the holiday, noted that “the British people are not, on the whole, a demonstrative people… [and] they are less inclined, perhaps, than any other member of the European family to formal celebrations in honour of themselves.”

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235 The Daily Jingo is probably a reference to either the Daily Mail or the Daily Express. Both are openly imperialistic half-penny newspaper that embodied the worst of yellow journalism for such intellectuals as G.K. Chesterton.


237 Ibid., 122.

238 The Times, 24 May 1909, 13.
the English supposedly are, it does not provide a suitable historical explanation for national resistance to Empire Day. The crowds that celebrated such imperial events as Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee (1897), the relief of Mafeking (1900), and above all, the public spectacles on Empire Day suggests that many English had few qualms about celebrating their imperial accomplishments. Despite Chesterton’s sardonic commentary, the true resistance to Empire Day may lie in terms of politics, not in psychology.

4b. Empire Day: The Vote-Catcher

In establishing its politics, the Conservative Party – just like any political party – utilized a specific rhetoric and certain symbols which become as representative of the political party as of the platform itself. In Edwardian England, the Tory propagandists successfully appropriated the Union Jack and the idealism of the empire as two major emblems of their party. When Empire Day left parts of the country covered in flags for a week, it was no wonder that The Times would claim that the Liberal Party was afraid to recognize the holiday for “fear [of] its influence.”

Accordingly, the Conservatives deemed Empire Day a relevant holiday not only to promote enthusiasm for the empire, but also to vouch explicitly for the main policies of their party. Indeed, the connection between the holiday and party politics was assumed by many from the beginning. This explains why a subscriber of the Daily Express could note that “there is no better decoration to wear on

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239 English, “Empire Day in Great Britain, 1904-1958,” 259. Some of the greatest heroes of the empire such as Joseph Chamberlain were in fact socially liberal. But with regards to the decisions about the empire however, these Liberals – who called themselves Liberal Unionists – were no different than the Conservative party. Indeed, they formed a coalition with the Conservative party in 1886. It lasted until the two parties completely merged in 1912 formed what has become the modern Conservative Party.

240 Ibid.
Empire-day than the badge of the Tariff Reform League…and thus publicly assert
his belief in what is true patriotism."\textsuperscript{241} MPs and others supporting a liberal
agenda were upset, but not surprised, to find that Conservative associations were
using Empire Day celebrations and the patriotic rhetoric omnipresent on this day
as way of promoting the People’s Budget, the House of Lords and other political
issues.\textsuperscript{242} In fact, when debating whether or not to sanction the holiday, one
member of the LCC noted in 1907 that there was “an underlying idea among the
majority that the keeping up on Empire Day belonged to one party.”\textsuperscript{243}

Because of this connection, many groups, especially those on the far Left
opposed a holiday. For example, the Islington branch of the Independent Labour
Party, stated that Empire Day was merely “sectarian political dogma.” They even
noted that if Empire Day existed, then they “should be allowed to have their
doctrine taught, e.g., “Socialism” on Labour Day, 1st May.”\textsuperscript{244} The socialists on
the Battersea Borough Council rejected the celebration of Empire Day on the
grounds that the empire itself was merely “a Tory vote-catcher in elections.”\textsuperscript{245}
Thus, despite the fact that Lord Meath ascertained that Empire Day had “no room
for the existence of any party, class, sectional, or race feeling,” the political reality
prevented the holiday from having such a unifying influence.\textsuperscript{246} Indeed, it seems
that the political divisions facing the empire were transposed onto Empire Day.
However, it was not merely because the empire was associated with Conservative
politics that many educational authorities protested it. The more radical members
in society protested the holiday not because of its partisan implications, but

\textsuperscript{241} \textit{The Daily Express}, 20 May 1912, 4.
\textsuperscript{242} Jeremiah MacVeagh, 07 July 1910, \textit{Hansard’s Parliamentary Debate}, vol. 18, Commons, col
1789; \textit{The Manchester Guardian}, 27 May 1910, 3.
\textsuperscript{243} \textit{School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette} 77 (1907), 420.
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette} 81 (1909), 576.
\textsuperscript{245} Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth and Empire,” 109.
\textsuperscript{246} \textit{The Times}, 14 May 1906, 6.
because they were opposed to any celebration that honored the current imperial enterprise.

4c. Against the Character of the Empire

As Catherine Hall has pointed out, although there were plenty of notable critics of the empire within Edwardian England, there were very few who believed that the British imperium was “bad” and must be destroyed.247 Even the more vitriolic critics such as J.A. Hobson and James Ramsay MacDonald believed there were theoretical justifications of the empire and the imperialism that made it.248 For example, as MacDonald’s Labour and the Empire (1907), a book which is considered representative of the everyday views of the Labour party, stated, the Labour Party “no more thinks of discussing whether the Stuarts should be restored to the throne than it does of debating whether we should break the Empire to pieces.”249 Thus, the debate at this time was over how the empire should be maintained, not if it should.

What these critics on the far Left were appalled by was the capitalistic exploitation rampant within Britain’s Empire in India, in Africa, and in the West Indies. For socialists, radicals or those with a more acute sense of humanitarianism than was prevalent within mainstream culture, the British Empire was the perpetuator of many crimes. One of the most influential critics, J.A. Hobson, noted in his Imperialism: A Study (1902) that Britain’s inherent moral authority gave it a chance to be a force of good in the world. Unfortunately, at that time, the empire was solely being used for the “cheap labour” which in reality was

249 J. Ramsay MacDonald, Labour and Empire (London: George Allen, 1907), 108.
“approximated to slavery.”\textsuperscript{250} The recent horrors accrued by the British against the Boers – for the Boer War saw the first usage of concentration camps – only furthered their resolve in the heinousness of British rule.\textsuperscript{251} Whereas imperialists defined responsibility in terms of conserving the imperial project, these “anti-imperialists” wished to see righteousness brought to a deeply corrupted empire.

According to the MP James Robertson, who later voted against an Empire Day Bill, the problem with imperial patriotism was that it inhibited “sociological analysis” of the empire; this pride framed “the existing empire as a thing wholly glorious,” which it clearly was not.\textsuperscript{252} Therefore, what these socialists, laborites, and radicals opposed was a holiday which would uncritically laud this oppressive empire. For example, the Battersea Borough Council continued to withhold support for the holiday mainly because the empire, and the flag that represented it, “meant injustice and oppression.”\textsuperscript{253} The leader of the Labour Party, Keir Hardie, believed that Empire Day polluted the youth’s mind “with a bogus form of sentimentality.” Instead of actually learning about the heinous nature of the British Empire, especially in India, children were merely learning to wave flags and to sing songs, especially that “ghastly bit of doggerel which had somehow come to be known as the National Anthem.”\textsuperscript{254} Accordingly, a holiday which celebrated the existing empire was antithetical to those individuals who wished to change the status quo.

More than that, many defied the holiday on the grounds that it promoted a dangerous and aggressive mentality among the population. To many more liberal

\textsuperscript{250} Porter, \textit{Critics of Empire}, 232.
\textsuperscript{251} As suggested in the first chapter, excessive violence against the Boers caused a moral dilemma in Great Britain. Empire Day was paradoxically both supported in attempts to restore the imperial ideal and was resisted on the grounds that the imperial ideal had proven itself to be false.
\textsuperscript{252} John M. Robertson, \textit{Patriotism and Empire} (London: Grant Richards, 1899), 144.
\textsuperscript{253} \textit{The Manchester Guardian}, 24 May 1908, 6.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 25 May 1908, 10.
Edwardians, including Robertson, imperialism had transformed patriotism from “love of country” into “love of more country” and valued militarism as the necessary instrument to actualize this goal. These three ideals had become so interconnected as to be considered “solidary.” To the parties committed “to the promotion of universal peace and universal arbitration,” i.e., the socialists and the laborites, Empire Day would therefore promote a jingo and aggressive spirit; accordingly, they resisted its spread. In addition, many other more moderate liberals saw Empire Day as dangerous for the same reason; it was a threat that promoted an aggressive ethos which would interfere with the proper development of Great Britain both domestically and internationally.

4d. Against the Character of Empire Day

British peoples from across the political spectrum, from Lord Meath to the James Ramsay MacDonald, felt assured of the superiority of the British race. However, divisions arose with regard to the manner in which this greatness was to be exhibited. Many more liberal individuals, even those who considered themselves imperialists, were fearful of the jingoistic rhetoric which Empire Day seemed to naturally support. Thus, protest towards Empire Day was not necessarily directed against the empire, but rather against the egotism and militarism inherent in a holiday with such an appellation. As Secretary of War R.B. Haldane, a prominent Liberal Imperialist who believed that proper education was fundamental to the future success of empire, said in 1909, “We do not think the Empire is held together by the flying of flags.” The implication is that the

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256 *School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette* 81 (1909), 411.
spirit promoted by Empire Day was not vital to the functioning of the empire as conservative imperialists like Lord Meath believed it to be.

It should be noted that the terms “empire” and “imperialism” were not fixed in the British lexicon. Between the 1840s and 1960s, the word “imperialism” went on to take twelve different meanings.\(^{258}\) However, by the 1900s, thanks in part to the rhetoric of the Conservative Party and the effects of the Boer War, the term empire was associated, at least in the minds of Liberals and Laborites, primarily with military conquests and exploitation. For example, one Liberal politician writing in protest of popularity of Empire Day over the Christian holiday Rogation-tide (which was to be celebrated on May 24\(^{th}\), 1909) defined “[t]he idea of Empire [as] swagger and bluster, and might against right; the tawdry splendour of militarism, and the dominion of strong over the feeble and the half-developed.”\(^{259}\) The Christian holiday he was supporting was about fasting, freedom and religion, in contrast, Empire Day was merely a self-indulgent feast.

Lord Meath was well aware of the contention of using such a loaded term as “empire” as the title of the holiday. When in 1907 the LCC was discussing whether to sanction the holiday, one member of the committee noted that Empire Day “was not a happy name.”\(^{260}\) The term “empire” implied conquest; a qualifier that did not imply the governance of Canada or Australia. As the LCC committee member noted, it was only India which was ruled imperially.\(^{261}\) It is for these reasons that Lord Meath constantly wrote to the *The Times* noting that the name of the holiday was not as important as teaching the “youth of the Empire in those virtues which tend towards good citizenship.” Accordingly, he recommended

\(^{258}\) Thompson, “The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895-1914,” 147.
\(^{260}\) *School Government Chronicle and Education Authorities Gazette* 77 (1907), 420.
\(^{261}\) Ibid.
other, less controversial titles such as Victoria Day or Empress Day. However, the name stuck and was accepted by millions of Britons for decades to come. What this suggests is that it was not merely the name of the holiday, but the manipulation of it by certain interest groups which upset so many individuals.

However, this opposition seems curious when compared to the rhetoric put forth by Lord Meath and his Empire Day movement. Lord Meath frequently denounced jingoism and militarism in his speeches and claimed that the EDM aimed for fraternity and peace within and without the British Empire. In his speech in the inaugural Empire Day in Great Britain in 1904, he noted that the supreme goal of celebrating Empire Day was to strive for “the advent of the time when peace and good will exist between all men upon Earth.” But, Empire Day frequently took on a different form. Perhaps the rifle competitions, drills, and the military tattoos were distasteful and even dangerous ceremonies to those who saw how terrible the Boer War had been.

This aggressive spirit never lurked too far below surface for many expressions of Empire Day. Indeed, in 1909, the Derby Educational Committee refused to celebrate the holiday because it was “the thin end of militarism.” For example, one song that was reportedly sung on Empire Day was called “Heart of Oak” and it consisted of pure imperialistic bragging. As the children were supposed to sing, “Heart of oak are our ships, heart of oak are our men,/We always are ready,/Steady, boys, steady,/We’ll fight and we’ll conquer again and again.” Another song previously mentioned in this thesis, “Meaning of Empire Day” also promoted an aggressive and militaristic ethos. As the children would

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262 *The Times*, 12 December 1905, 11.
263 Ibid., 25 May 1904, 4.
sing, “What is the meaning of Empire Day? Why do the cannons roar?” It was this strand of rowdy and explicit imperialism that made many in Great Britain uncomfortable.

Boycotting Empire Day celebrations, as opposed to having anti-Empire Day celebrations, was the most common manner of resisting. Whereas those who supported the holiday flew flags from many public and private buildings, those who opposed Empire Day – according to a resentful imperialistic newspaper – “confined the celebration to a display of naked flagstaffs with idle halyards flapping against them in the breeze.”266 Moreover, since Empire Day was a school holiday, oppositional groups, such as the British Socialist Party, urged parents to keep their children from schools on Empire Day “as a protest against the lessons given on that day in schools.”267 However, resistance to the holiday was not only organized by political bodies. Many parents withheld their children from school, teachers refused to give the prescribed lesson plans about the empire and the local-education authorities refused to celebrate the holiday in opposition to the content and form of the history of the empire. 268 This was because, as mentioned previously in this thesis, the story of the empire was frequently portrayed as one of military conquest and Anglo-Saxon dominance. It should be remembered that the more liberal individuals did not disagree with this racialized conception of the world, and they generally believed that Britain’s place in the world was a source of good and benevolence.269 However, the pride expressed on Empire Day could be jingoistic, simplistic and aggressive. These apprehensive Edwardians – many

266 The Daily Express, 25 May 1909, 4.
267 The Manchester Guardian, 30 March 1913, 12.
268 Porter, The Absent-Minded Imperialists, 209-210. This is unsurprising given that teachers and many local education authorities were more likely to be of the liberal persuasion as it was.
who considered themselves imperialists – did not wish to see the country plunged into more costly colonial or European conflicts.

4e. The Parliamentary Debate until 1916

The different yet related reasons to protest the holiday were all expressed in the Parliamentary debate concerning Empire Day from 1905 until 1916, when it was finally officially sanctioned by the Parliament of Great Britain.²⁷⁰ As democratically elected figures that directly represented the desires of their constituents, MPs had the same qualms with the holiday as did the general public. However, these MPs also were in control of the legislative body which controlled not only the four distinct nations of the United Kingdom, but also the entire empire in theory. Given all the 400 million people they supposedly had to consider in their legislating, officially sanctioning Empire Day, according to the MP Charles Dilke, was a “very delicate matter.”²⁷¹

Many MPs were aware that the holiday would not necessarily propagate the imperial unity that Lord Meath claimed it would. This is because although virtually everyone in England supported the empire either explicitly or tacitly, the same mindset did not apply to the 370 million other individuals who did not live in the “center” or the “heart” of the empire. As Charles Dilke, the Liberal MP noted in 1910, “A day set apart for an Imperial celebration in some parts of the Empire is a source of division and peril among people equally patriotic.”²⁷² This is especially true of Irish Nationalists, 85 of whom were MPs in the Parliament in

²⁷⁰ Only Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, and Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire” note the Parliamentary debate and their analysis comprises of several paragraphs. Also, it is worth noting that the Liberal Government was the majority party from 1906 until 1918.
London.\textsuperscript{273} For example, in 1908, when Captain Craig, an Irish Unionist who would later be the first leader of Northern Ireland, asked that the flag be flown above all governmental departments on Empire Day, an Irish Nationalist interrupted by asking Craig “what Ireland has gained from the Imperial policy of the late Government that her people should take off their hats and shout on Empire Day?”\textsuperscript{274} Indeed, when Captain Craig asked Parliament to officially recognize the holiday in April of 1910, the Bill was defeated 242 to 150, to loud cheers from the Irish Nationalists and Labour members. Of the 242 votes, 70 came from the Irish Nationalists.\textsuperscript{275} Furthermore, it should be noted that the election prior to the vote, in January 1910, had ended in a virtual tie between the Unionist party – Conservatives, Irish Unionists and Liberal Unionists – who had 272 MPs and the Liberal Party who had 274 MPs. To break this deadlock, the Liberal party agreed to give the Irish Nationalists home rule in return for Irish Nationalist support of the Liberal agenda. Thus, the Liberal Party was motivated by its desire not to alienate the Irish Nationalists whose support they so desperately needed.

However, it would be erroneous to conclude that the members of the Liberal Party did not wish to recognize Empire Day for the sole purpose that they did not want to offend their political allies. Another important reason was, as

\textsuperscript{273} The people of Ireland were split with regard to their relation with the United Kingdom. During the Edwardian period, they were primarily divided into two camps. One group wished to remain part of the United Kingdom and for the most part, they lived in the North, were predominately Protestant and thus were members of the Unionist party. In opposition to them was the majority of the population of Ireland who lived in the South. These were mostly Catholic Irish Nationalists who wished to free themselves from the yoke of the English which, according to their narrative, had been forced upon them since 1172. The Act of Union in 1802 between Ireland and Great Britain had brought 100 Irishmen, many of whom wished to dissolve their connection to the United Kingdom into Parliament. This significant minority had a significant impact in British political history throughout. Also, at this time, the Irish Nationalists were split into two camps, the Irish Parliamentary Party and the more conservative All-For-Ireland league. However, as suggested above, both wished for Home Rule for Ireland. For more see Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 1999).

\textsuperscript{274} William Delany, 11 May 1908, *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 188, *Commons*, col. 739.

\textsuperscript{275} See appendix A for the information on the MPs voting for the Empire Day Bill (1910).
aforementioned, the connection between the Conservative party and the holiday. The partisan nature inherent to the holiday was so clear, that when debating the holiday in 1907, one MP saw government sanctioning as analogous to “officially recognizing Tariff Reform Day.” Accordingly, the Liberal MPs most likely did not want to officially recognize a holiday which would undermine their political capital. More importantly however, they, like many other educators across England believed that Empire Day would promote a jingoistic and aggressive spirit.

When discussing official governmental recognition in Parliament in 1916, the Archbishop of Canterbury noted that before the Great War the “idea… that this movement [to have Empire Day] was essentially the teaching of a militarism which must be mischievous” was prevalent. Accordingly, this is what prevented a “large minority…[that] represent[ed] some very important parts of the country” from recognizing the holiday. Before the war, many Liberal MPs and educational authorities believed that celebrating the Britain’s imperial rule was an inherently unabashed expression of patriotism. This was only amplified by the militaristic tone of many of the holiday’s salient celebrations. In addition, the notions of moral paternalism and welfare that were strong components of the government in power after 1906 caused many MPs to be hesitant about explicitly celebrating Britain’s military domination a larger proportion of the world. As result that refused to recognize the holiday and even used their power to prevent some of the more military-looking demonstrations to take place.

278 Alfred Milner, Ibid., col. 605.
4f. Conclusion: Empire Day after World War I

It was not until the conscription crisis of 1916 that the government of Great Britain agreed to officially recognize the holiday.279 With troops and supplies being sent from every corner – most notably India and Ireland – to help in the war effort, it became harder to assume that a day celebrating the British imperium would cause offense. Furthermore, at a time when the entire society was involved in the war effort either emotionally or physically, claims of militarism appeared moot. In addition, after the war, the expression of Empire Day changed to reflect the new dilemmas and transformed ideologies of post-War Britain. In a society which had experienced around 2,000,000 casualties in the course of four years, the ideal of self-sacrifice was conceptualized and expressed in a new way. Thus, what was once a day for flag-waving and festivities became a solemn day to remember those who had fallen in the Great War.280

Nonetheless, much of the same political opposition to the holiday remained as it had been before the war. For example, The Manchester Guardian lamented that the Conservative party still saw themselves as the party of the empire and “Empire Day as the special recognition of that profitable fact.”281 In addition, the position of the Labour party remained one, according to one author writing in 1920s, not “of removal but revision” of the British Empire. The party wished to demolish Britain’s authoritative rule and instead construct a “real commonwealth of free nations.” To do this it would have to remove “the flag waving and dangerous pride and exultation in domination” that a holiday like Empire Day promoted.282 Therefore, it seems that Britain’s imperial identity

281 Ibid., 266.
continued to be a source of pride as well as contention for the population of England.

However, the point remains that many Liberal or liberal educators and imperialists supported Empire Day. As the widespread demonstration suggests, one did not have to be Conservative to celebrate Empire Day. This is due to the fact that a national-imperial identity promoted on Empire Day was intended for all classes and evoked the basic human emotions of pride and sense of belonging. Of course this ideal did not always transcend the political context of the time and as the above chapter demonstrated, there existed a range of feelings about Britain’s imperial position. Either way, the profound resonance of Empire Day, whether it was promoted or resisted, reflects that Britain’s imperial position was a central component to the Edwardian identity.
Conclusion

Exactly ten years after his inaugural speech in Exeter Hall, Lord Meath stood under a wildly flapping Union Jack and braved the rain storm that had opened up moments before to receive the salute of 6,000 men and boys marching through Hyde Park.²⁸³ The event must have only furthered his immense pride and satisfaction in the ability of his Empire Day Movement to spread the holiday throughout Great Britain. Indeed, the rush by young men to enlist in the war three months later only validated his conviction in the influence of his Empire Day Movement to not only promote the holiday, but also and more importantly instill a moral responsibility in the youth of Great Britain. As he claimed in an interview in 1921:

A large proportion of those young men from all parts of the Empire who rushed to the Colours during the bloody years from 1914 must have learnt at school the watchwords of the movement. Would they have answered their country’s call so readily if they had not acquired in their early years a knowledge of the obligations of a free citizenship?²⁸⁴

In this passage, Lord Meath assigned himself tremendous influence and importance to the spread of Empire Day by noting that it was his watchwords that motivated so many men to go off to war. Since then, the few studies of Empire Day there have been also view Lord Meath as the ideological epicenter as well as the main impetus for the propagation of this holiday.²⁸⁵

In response, this study has demonstrated that the spread of the holiday was not simply the result of the efforts made by a few propagandizing imperialists such as Lord Meath. Cities, towns and villages across England enthusiastically celebrated the holiday in a variety of ways that included concerts, shooting

²⁸³ *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1914, 12.
²⁸⁴ *The Times*, 24 May 1921, 11.
²⁸⁵ This is most true for Mangan, “The ‘Grit’ of Our Forefathers” and Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire.”
competitions and parades. Indeed, including actions such as singing, hanging up flags, or observing parades, then the holiday undoubtedly affected millions of English children and adults. What such massive celebrations demonstrate is the centrality of Britain’s imperial position in the expression of a mainstream Edwardian national-imperial identity.

In addition, the specifics behind the message of the holiday were not as self-evident as historians have assumed. Previous studies are correct in concluding that the holiday was, generally speaking, an attempt to raise imperial patriotism in the young and awaken their responsibility to the empire. However, they have failed to specify the character and parameters of the imperial ethos which lay behind the holiday. In contrast, this study has examined what exactly constituted responsibility to the empire in Edwardian England. As Chapter Two demonstrated, this identity was framed as imperial citizenship; one that was not defined in terms of legal rights, but rather as a more abstract set of attitudes and beliefs. Although they used a weighty rhetoric, educators and imperialists entwined imperial patriotism with a rather localized and limited series of normative behavior that promoted loyalty to the nation-state and social harmony.

There are a myriad of factors such as political affiliations, class, or geographical location which comprise one’s identity. Nonetheless, as suggested by the actions of countless individuals in the preceding chapters, membership to the empire became a secular religion which had the potential to subsume the aforementioned associations. This was achieved on Empire Day by promoting the primacy of the nation-state and infusing its presence into every civic action of the individual. Accordingly, the empire was not merely a source of pride or inspiration, but also a fundamental component of how Edwardians made sense of
their world. The countless manifestations of the day show that this national consciousness was not simply grafted onto the public by Lord Meath, but rather was a pre-existing internalization of empire and nation-state in British society.

However, within this imperial identity lay a broad gamut of dissenting and competing views. While previous historians have treated Empire Day mostly as a uniform expression of British society to revel in imperial pageantry, this study has attempted to show varying ways that the holiday was expressed. As Catherine Hall stated, “there was never one view of empire in Britain – rather a cacophony of voices, debating the rights and wrongs of what kind of empire there should be and how it should be ruled.” As Chapters Three and Four demonstrated, the various manifestations of Empire Day reflect this “cacophony;” the holiday, like the empire itself, meant various things to various people. While some groups saw the holiday as the perfect time to parade in full uniform and shoot guns, others used it to give chocolate to children or to recite speeches on the need for peace. This study does not deny the hegemony of the nationalist-imperial identity being promoted on this day, but instead reveals the various contours previously undetected in studies of Empire Day. Thus, in giving this fuller description of the holiday, this study has attempted to provide a more nuanced view of what historians have usually concluded was an unabashedly imperialistic society.

Furthermore, despite the fact that newspapers such as The Times reported Empire Day celebrations in other colonies, the focus of the holiday within England was undoubtedly on itself. Empire Day was not a celebration of the cultures of the West Indies, Burma, Australia or India; the citizenship promoted on the day did not require one to travel throughout the empire or buy goods from

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286 Catherine Hall “Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain,” 202.
the empire.\footnote{Although companies still used the empire as a marketing device, this idea did not really take off until the 1920s and 1930s. It even started to receive government support. For more see Stephen Constantine, “Bringing the Empire Alive”: the Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926-33,” in \textit{Imperialism and Popular Culture}, ed. John M. Mackenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).} Indeed, the ceremonies sometimes lacked any explicitly imperial content while still promoting an “imperial” ethos. For example, many of the more common ceremonies such as forming Union Jacks, participating in drills, singing songs about England or Great Britain or competing in rifle competitions were not in themselves inherently imperial. Thus, the expression of Empire Day marked a transmutation of British patriotism into an imperial mode in which every attitude or behavior was framed in relation to the empire.

Accordingly, the holiday was not used to offer a window into the cultures of the various colonies or dominions, but rather a mirror in which children could view their greatness. From its conception to its actual manifestations, Empire Day was an unequivocally an ethnocentric affair; a celebration of the ascendancy of a specific race, language, values and associated traditions that originated from England and the rest of Great Britain.\footnote{P.J. Marshall, “Imperial Britain,” in \textit{The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire}, ed. P.J. Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 336-7.} In other words, the imperial system reflected and reinforced – as opposed to defined – pre-established character traits that were solidly of the British peoples. Thus, the empire in Edwardian England was primarily an ideal around which imperialists and educators constructed a markedly national ethos which was committed to maintaining the success and stability of Great Britain, and by extension ‘the world’s most righteous empire.’
Appendix One

Statistics regarding the House of Common’s vote on the Empire Day Bill, 19 April 1910. The house divided, Ayes, 150; Noes, 242.289

Table 1

Information about MPs voting NO for the Empire Day Bill (1910)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party of MP</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Irish Parliamentary Party</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>All-For-Ireland</th>
<th>Liberal Unionist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of votes</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total voting NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Information about MPs voting YES for the Empire Day Bill (1910)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party of MP</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Liberal Unionist</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Irish Unionist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of votes</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total voting YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

289 19 April 1910, Hansard’s Parliamentary Debate, vol. 16, Commons, col. 1899-901. Figures for Table 1 and Table 2 were compiled using the information provided by Michael Stenton and Stephen Lees, Who's Who of British Members of Parliament, vol. II (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978).
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