



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

British Poetry and the Empire, c. 1815–1914: Voices and Echoes

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**Lecture I:
Voices**

Eliza Cook, 'The Englishman'

In *Melaia and Other Poems* (London: R. J. Wood, 1838), 87–88.

<https://books.google.it/books?id=URJhAAAACAAJ>.

1 THERE'S a land that bears a well-known name,
 Though it is but a little spot;
 I say 'tis the first on the scroll of fame,
 And who shall aver it is not?
 5 Of the deathless ones who shine and live
 In arms, in arts, or song,
 The brightest the whole wide world can give
 To that little land belong.
 'Tis the star of earth, deny it who can,
 10 The island home of an Englishman.

 There's a flag that waves o'er every sea,
 No matter when or where;
 And to treat that flag as aught but the free,
 Is more than the strongest dare.
 15 For the lion spirits that tread the deck
 Have carried the palm of the brave;
 And that flag *may* sink with a shot-torn wreck,
 But never float over a slave.
 Its honour is stainless, deny it who can,
 20 And this is the flag of an Englishman.

 There's a heart that leaps with burning glow
 The wrong'd and the weak to defend;
 And strikes as soon for a trampled foe
 As it does for a soul-bound friend.
 25 It nurtures a deep and honest love,
 The passions of faith and pride,
 And yearns with the fondness of a dove
 To the light of its own fire-side.
 'Tis a rich rough gem, deny it who can,
 30 And this is the heart of an Englishman.

The Briton may traverse the pole or the zone,
And boldly claim his right,
For he calls such a vast domain his own,
That the sun never sets on his might.

35 Let the haughty stranger seek to know
The place of his home and birth;
And a flush will pour from cheek to brow
While he tells his native earth.
For a glorious charter, deny it who can,
40 Is breathed in the words "I'm an Englishman".

William Michael Rossetti, 'Emigration'

In *Sonnets of Three Centuries: A Selection*, ed. T. Hall Cain (London: Elliot Stock, 1882), 176. <https://archive.org/details/sonnetsofthreece00cainuoft>.

1 WEAVE o'er the world your weft, yea weave your selves,
Imperial races, weave the warp thereof.
Swift like your shuttle speed the ships, and scoff
At wind and wave. And, as a miner delves

5 For hidden treasure bedded deep in stone,
So seek ye and find the treasure patriotism
In lands remote and dipped with alien chrism,
And make those new lands heart-dear and your own.

Weave o'er the world your selves. Half-human man

10 Wanes from before your faces like a cloud
Sun-stricken, and his soil becomes his shroud.

But of your souls and bodies ye shall make
The sovereign vesture of its leagueless span,
Clothing with history cliff and wild and lake.

Lewis Morris, 'A Song of Empire: June 20, 1887'

In *Songs of Britain* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887), 163–82.
<https://archive.org/details/songsbritain03morrgoog>.

1 FIRST Lady of our English race,
 In Royal dignity and grace
 Higher than all in old ancestral blood,
 But higher still in love of good,
 5 And care for ordered Freedom, grown
 To a great tree where'er
 In either hemisphere,
 Its vital seeds are blown;
 Where'er with every day begun
 10 Thy English bugles greet the coming sun!

 Thy life is England's. All these fifty years
 Thou from thy lonely Queenly place
 Hast watched the clouds and sunshine on her face;
 Hast marked her changing hopes and fears;
 15 Her joys and sorrows have been always thine;
 Always thy quick and Royal sympathy
 Has gone out swiftly to the humblest home,
 Wherever grief and pain and suffering come.

 Therefore it is that we
 20 Take thee for head and symbol of our name.
 For fifty years of reign thou wert the same,
 Therefore to-day we make our jubilee.
 Firm set on ancient right, as on thy people's love,
 Unchecked thy wheels of empire onward move.
 25 Not as theirs is thy throne
 Who, though their hapless subjects groan,
 Sit selfish, caring not at all.
 Until the fierce mob surges and they fall,
 Or the assassin sets the down-trod free.
 30 Not such thy fate on this thy jubilee,
 But love and reverence in the hearts of all.

Oh England! Empire wide and great
 As ever from the shaping hand of fate
 Did issue on the earth, august, large grown!
 35 What were the Empires of the past to thine,
 The old old Empires ruled by kings divine —
 Egypt, Assyria, Rome? What rule was like thine own,
 Who over all the round world bearest sway?
 Not those alone who thy commands obey
 40 Thy subjects are; but in the boundless West
 Our grandsires lost, still is thy reign confest.
 “The Queen” they call thee, the young People strong,
 Who, being Britons, might not suffer wrong,
 But are reknit with us in reverence for thee;
 45 Therefore it is we make our jubilee.

See what a glorious throng they come,
 Turned to their ancient home,
 The children of our England! See
 What vigorous company
 50 Thou sendest, Greater England of the Southern Sea!
 Thy stately cities, thick with domes and spires,
 Chase the illumined night with festal fires
 In honour of their Queen, whose happy reign
 Began when, 'mid their central roar,
 55 The naked savage trod the pathless plain.
 Thousands of miles, North, South, East, West, to-day,
 Their countless herds and flocks unnumbered stray.
 Theirs are the vast primæval forest depths profound;
 Yet everywhere are found
 60 The English laws, the English accents fair,
 'Mid burning North or cooler Southern air.
 A world within themselves, and with them blent
 Island with continent
 The green isles, jewels on the tropic blue,
 65 Where flower and tree and bird are strange and new;
 Or that which lies within a temperate air
 As summer-England fair;
 Or those, our Southern Britain that shall be,

Set in the lonely sea.

- 70 Lands of deep fiord and snow-clad soaring hill,
 Wherethrough the ocean-currents ebb and fill,
 And craters vast, wherefrom the prisoned force
 Of the great earth-fires runs its dreadful course.
 And vales of fern and palm, whence rising like a dream
 75 High in mid-heaven, the ghostly ice-fields gleam.

And from her far and wintry North

The great Dominion issues forth.

Fit nurse of stalwart British hearts and strong;

From her black pine woods, deep in snow.

- 80 Her billowy prairies boundless as the sea,
 Where on the sweet untroubled soil
 Yearly the unnoticed, countless wild-flowers blow,
 And by men's fruitful and compelling toil
 Yearly the deep and bounteous harvests grow;
 85 From the lone plains, wherethrough the icy wind
 Sweeps from the North, leaving the Pole behind;
 In whose brief summer suns, so fierce they shine,
 Flourish alike the apple and the vine;
 From teeming ancient cities bright and fair,
 90 Whether in summer's heat or frosty wintry air,
 Stamped with the nameless charm and grace
 Of a more joyous race;
 Or on the rounding prairie nestling down
 Homestead and frequent new-built town.
 95 Even to those ultimate wilds where comes to be
 Another Westminster on the Pacific Sea.

Nor shall thy Western Isles

Be wanting, where the high green breakers fall

Upon the torrid shore, and nature smiles;

- 100 And yet sometimes broods over all.
 Thick woods and hot lagunes with steaming breath,
 A nameless presence with a face of death.
 Fair balmy Isles, where never wintry air
 Ruffles the scentless tropic blossoms fair,

105 Upon whose sun-warmed fruitful soil
 Our father's dusky freedmen toil.
 Lands of bright plumes that flash from tree to tree,
 Long creepers trailing thick with brilliant bloom,
 And loud upon the forest's silent gloom

110 The plunging surges of the encircling sea.

And from the ancient land

Scorching beneath the strong unfailing sun,
 Round thee thy unnumbered subject millions stand;
 From many a storied city fair,

115 Old ere our England, first begun,

From marble tomb and temple white,
 Built ere our far forefathers were,
 And still a miracle defying Time;

Palaces gray with age and dark with crime,

120 Fierce superstitions, only quenched in blood,

And sweet flower-fancies yearning towards the light,
 And lustral cleansings in the sacred flood,
 Where by dim temple cool, or shaded street,
 From hill or parchèd plain the wayworn pilgrims meet.

125 And from the unhappy Continent

Which breeds the savage and the slave —

From our enormous South, there shall be sent

A scanty band of strong self-governed men.

And from those poisoned swamps, to-day a grave,

130 But which one day shall smile with plenty, when

The onward foot of Knowledge, slow, sublime,

Has traversed her and set her children free

From ocean to her fabulous inland sea,

And the fierce savage, full of kingly grace,

135 Is father of a gentler race,

And peaceful commerce heals the wounds of Time,

And the long history of blood and pain

Comes nevermore again.

And nearest to thee, and of all most dear,
 140 Thy people of these little Northern Isles,
 Who never shall their Queen forget,
 Nor be forgotten, whether Fortune smiles
 Or armèd Europe storm around,
 Whom none assail, beyond the waves' deep sound.
 145 Behind their surge-struck ramparts safe and free
 These are thy closest subjects, these
 The brain and heart of Empire, as thy Rose
 Within its close-ranged petals comes to hold
 A perfumed heart of gold,
 150 Wherein the seed of the miraculous flower,
 Safe hid, defies Fate's power.
 And most of all thy wondrous mother-town
 Upon our broad Thames sitting like a crown,
 Who, 'mid her healthful labour-laden air,
 155 Grows every day more fair;
 Whom not for fairness do her children prize,
 But for her gracious homely memories —
 A nation, not a city, the loved home
 Whereto the longing thoughts of exiled Britons come!

 160 What is it that their voices tell?
 What is it that in naming thee they praise?
 Not wider empire only; that is well.
 But there are worthier triumphs, peaceful days,
 Just laws, a people happier than before,
 165 And rolling on untroubled evermore,
 With larger stream, and fuller and more free
 The tide of ordered liberty.
 These things than empire higher are,
 Higher and nobler far.

 170 Our old Draconic Law
 With children's blood cemented, no more kills
 Its tale of innocent victims. Pitying Love
 Amid the abjects deigns to-day to move
 Whom no man cared for. If the cruel city

175 Still claims its thousands, by the outcasts stand
 Pure men and women in a gentle band,
 Linked in a ministry of Love and Pity.
 No more the insensate State
 Binds down the worker, to exaggerate
 180 The unequal gifts of Fate,
 But comes instead, some care for common good,
 Some glimmering sense of growing brotherhood.
 No more half deafened by the unresting loom,
 Soulless as is the brute, the pallid children pine;
 185 Nor hapless slaves, half naked, 'mid the gloom
 And grime and squalor of the sunless mine,
 The young girl-workers coarsen, but all take
 Some modest gleam of knowledge, which may breed
 The faith that is above, yet under, every creed,
 190 And of these humble lives, one day shall make
 True citizens indeed.

Nor shall thy peoples' voice
 Keep silence of the salutary change
 Which brought the gift of fullest freedom down
 195 To humble lives, whether by field or town;
 The potent gift, and strange,
 Which wakes alone the wider civic sense,
 Which, more than knowledge, sobers heart and mind,
 And rich and poor in closer ties can bind,
 200 And knits a nation firm in harmony!
 Let civil broils and fiercer dissidence
 Come — we are one. What care have we?
 In speech, in action, we are free.
 No mob law need we fear, or senseless anarchy,
 205 And for all these rejoice.

What law for us has done,
 For all our greater England 'neath the sun,
 Let us do now, building on high a State
 Of half the World confederate!
 210 Sure, 'twere the noblest victory of mind

Thy scattered realms to bind;
 To guide the toiling, hopeless feet
 To where is work for all, and life is sweet;
 To teach our millions their great heritage,
 215 To call together high world-councils sage,
 Strong as the Priest's, in this our island-home;
 Then, though the armèd world shall come,
 What care, what fear, have we,
 Who, being free, are one; and, being one, are free?

220 If all the wide Earth brings our millions food,
 And if our navies whiten every sea,
 If we have rest and wider brotherhood,
 All these began with thee;
 And shall, if Heaven so will, still more increase
 225 With thy remaining years, till blessèd Peace,
 Half frighted from us now by grave alarms
 Of half a world in arms,
 Shall brood, a white-winged Angel, o'er the Earth.
 Then may the rule of Wrong be done!
 230 Then may a new and Glorious Sun
 Gild the illumined World! and then
 Come Righteousness to men!

 Three sovereigns of our English line
 Have reached thy length of rule, each of his name the third,
 235 But never England's heart was stirred
 By those as 'tis by thine.
 Our Henry died lonely and girt with foes;
 Our greater Edward fell in dotage ere life's close;
 And he thy grandsire knew a troublous time,
 240 A dim pathetic figure! full of pain
 And care too great for mortal to sustain,
 And in his rayless sorrow grown sublime!

 Three Queens have swayed
 Our England's fortunes — great Elizabeth,
 245 In whose brave times the blast of war

Blew loud and fierce and far.

Her dauntless sailors dared the unbounded West,

And fought the Armada's might, and did prevail,

And wheresoe'er was seen an English sail

250 Her Empire was confest;

And round her gracious throne immortal flowers of song

Bloomed beautiful, bloomed long,

And left our English tongue as sweet as it was strong.

And when a century and more had passed

255 In blood and turmoil, came a Queen at last.

Her soldiers and her sailors once again

Conquered on tented field and on the main,

And once more rose the choir of song;

Not as the Elizabethan, deep and strong,

260 But, tripping lightly on its jewelled feet,

Issued politely sweet,

And Shakespeare's tongue and Milton's learned to dance

The minuet of France.

And now again once more

265 A Queen reigns o'er us as before;

Again by land and sea

We cast the chequered sum of victory.

Once more our English tongue

Wakes to unnumbered bursts of song.

270 A great choir lifts again its accents fair,

And to those greater singers, if we find

To-day no answering mind,

'Tis that too large the Present fills the view,

Yet has its great names too.

275 Part of the glorious fellowship are we

The great Victorian company,

Which, since old Caëdmon's deep voice carolled strong,

Through England's chequered story bore along

The high pure fire of the world's sweetest song.

280 But not in the increase
 Of Empire, or the victories of peace,
 Chiefly we seek thy praise.
 But that thy long and gracious days,
 Lived in the solitude that hems a throne,
 285 Since thy great sorrow came and left thee lone.
 Were ever white, and free from thought of blame.
 Not once in thy long years shadow of envy came
 On thee, or him, whose stainless manhood bore
 Thy love's unfading flower. Never before
 290 In all our England was a royal home
 Whereto the loving thoughts of humble hearts might come.
 Thy children's children stand around thy knees,
 Their children come in turn as fair as these;
 Thy people and thy children turn to thee,
 295 Knit all in one by bonds of sympathy
 With thee, our Queen, are we;
 Therefore we make our solemn jubilee!

 Flash, festal fires, high on the joyous air!
 Clash, joy-bells! joy-guns, roar! and, jubilant trumpets, blare!
 300 Let the great noise of our rejoicing rise!
 Glean, long-illuminated cities, to the skies
 Round all the earth, in every clime,
 So far your distance half confuses time!
 As in the old Judæan history,
 305 Fling wide the doors and set the prisoners free!
 Wherever England is o'er all the world,
 Fly, banner of Royal England, stream unfurled!
 The proudest Empire that has been, to-day
 Rejoices and makes solemn jubilee.
 310 For England! England! we our voices raise!
 Our England! England! England! in our Queen we praise!
 We love not war, but only peace,
 Yet never shall our England's power decrease!
 Whoever guides our helm of State,
 315 Let all men know it, England shall be great!
 We hold a vaster Empire than has been!

Nigh half the race of man is subject to our Queen!

Nigh half the wide, wide earth is ours in fee!

And where her rule comes, all are free.

320 And therefore 'tis, oh Queen, that we,
Knit fast in bonds of temperate liberty,
Rejoice to-day, and make our solemn jubilee!!

**Lecture II:
Echoes**

Arthur Stanley Megaw, 'Editor's Preface'

In *Patriotic Song: A Book of English Verse*, ed. Arthur Stanley Megaw (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1901), ix–x. <https://archive.org/details/patrioticsongboo00megarich>.

THIS book is intended to be a representative collection of the patriotic poetry of the British Empire. I have taken a wide view of the term "patriotic" — wide enough, indeed, to include the Jacobite Songs of Scotland and the National Songs of Ireland.

Many of my numbers breathe the spirit of war; for the national instinct is most deeply stirred in times of great national emotion. But I have aimed at making this volume something more than a book of war-songs, holding that a man may prove his patriotism as well at home in the pursuit of his daily business as on the battlefield in the presence of his country's enemies. Love of country is the root of the matter; and, after all, it is harder to live for one's country than to die for it.

I gratefully acknowledge the debt I owe to authors and owners of copyright poems. I am equally grateful to all who, whether at home or in the Colonies, have given me encouragement, assistance, or advice. My obligations to Professor Dowden, Mr. W. E. Henley, and Mr. A. T. Quiller-Couch are very great.

My scheme, as originally conceived, provided for the inclusion of a section representing the patriotism of America; but, on reconsideration, I have decided not to go beyond the limits of the British Empire.

A. S.

J. E. C. Welldon, 'Introduction'

In *Patriotic Song: A Book of English Verse*, ed. Arthur Stanley Megaw (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1901), xi–xii. <https://archive.org/details/patrioticsongboo00mearich>.

THE present collection of patriotic songs will, I think, accord with the imperial spirit of the day; for they are representative of the whole British Empire.

It is needless to dwell upon the inspiring energy of song. Since the age of Tyrtæus it has everywhere been recognised as a powerful incentive to valour. A nation can scarcely exist without a national anthem. How characteristic are the anthems of the nations! It may almost be said that the difference of the English and the French nations is expressed by the contrast between *God Save the King* and the *Marseillaise*. What an influence songs have exercised upon the life of nations! The debt of Scotland to Burns, the debt of Ireland to Moore, is greater than words can tell. Fletcher of Saltoun was perhaps not wrong in his estimate of the songs, as compared with the laws, of a nation.

I am not responsible for the present collection; perhaps, if I had made it, I should have left out some few songs which find a place in it, and should have inserted some few others which do not, but the purpose of it I heartily approve. To consolidate the Empire, and to animate it as a whole with noble ideas, is one of the greatest needs and duties of the present day; and an empire, like an admiral, lives not by bread alone, but by its sentiments, its ambitions, its ideals.

J. E. C. CALCUTTA

October 1901.

John Lang and Jean Lang, 'Introduction'

In *Poetry of Empire: Nineteen Centuries of British History*, ed. John Lang and Jean Lang (London: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1910), v–vi. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924013292465>.

"AND the cry of the two hosts went up through the higher air to the splendour of Zeus". So wrote Homer of the glorious warfare by the Scamander; and it is often the curse of war more than the blessing of peace that lifts the commonplace to the atmosphere of the sublime.

Warfare between Roman and Briton, between Celt and Saxon, Englishman and Scot, Irishman and Englishman, bitter civil warfare — all these have helped to make our nation what it is. The story of a nation is always a story of bloodshed; many a time and oft of blood that has been wrongfully and wastefully shed. In times of peace national growth continues — as grows a coral reef — quietly, persistently; but it is the God of Battles who moulds peoples, and they are not days of prosperous commercialism, but days of storm and stress, that bring out what is best in the children of men. The Poetry of the British Empire has many a gallant tale to tell of fights by land and by sea, for without much fighting, fighting not only with men, but with the elements, with the very forces of Nature, there can be no Empire making.

In this Anthology the compilers have endeavoured to give as far as possible in verse form a Chronological History of the British Nation. There are those who find fault with the idea of an Imperial Anthology including poems descriptive of incidents which took place before the peoples of Great Britain were welded into one. Just because that process of welding — each stone laid in far back days — has helped to make the British nation, we intentionally include as many of those poems as possible. Many pieces which we believe have not hitherto appeared in any anthology are contained in the volume. There are also poems which are purely patriotic, and which do not deal with any special historical event, but merely put in words the spirit of the people.

Beginning as far back as the Welsh bard, Taliessen, we go on to the songs of the sons of the "Old Grey Mother", and we have included poems by Australian, Canadian, and South African writers. Of necessity, in an anthology of limited bulk much that is excellent must be omitted, and the law of copyright also has forbidden the inclusion of some of what is finest in the poetry that tells of brave deeds done by Britannia's sons. Of poems that should have been included, the list, indeed, seems almost endless, and were it not that "a time comes when we must have done", this volume might have run far beyond the limits assigned to it by the Publishers.

To some of the ballads that have found a place, such for instance as "The Capture of Carrickfergus", "Thurot's Dream", and several others, it may well be objected that they are not poetry. It is felt, however, that they fill a gap in our History and tell tales that to most of us are little known. Their interest must plead for them.

Serious gaps notwithstanding, it is surprising how complete a narration it has been found possible to present, and it may be claimed that here are recorded most of the deeds which have seized and held the imaginations of the British people — a living expression, not of national growth only, but of the essential spirit of the Race. If the history is in no sense systematic, it is at least dramatic.