

SOME THRILLING STORIES BY
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Frontispiece from "THE BARBERS OF THE NARROW SEAS"

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1 Discovering the Pleasures of War

Man has always been seeking after a Utopia where he will enjoy peace and plenty, ease, comfort and perfection in all things, but universal peace is an unattainable ideal which to practical men is a mere will-o-the-wisp . . . the means of improvement must be the same as in the past, namely war, relentless war of extermination of inferior individuals and nations. The process will be slower than in the past, because natural selection is hindered and thwarted by civilised man.

Brigadier-General R. C. Hart, 'A Vindication of War' (1911)

Most historians have portrayed nineteenth-century Britons as an essentially peace-loving, commercially-minded people who shunned warlike activity and had little interest in or respect for their army. Only during the last decade of that century were they led astray by arch-patriots and bellicose imperial propaganda and infected with a malignant jingoism. This aggressive, warlike mentality of the 1890s, it has been argued, was not just a British sickness, but a supra-national disease which afflicted all Europe at that time, and led ultimately to the tragedy of 1914. For most of the period, we have been told, the British avoided war as far as possible, seeing it as a disastrous impediment to trade and human progress.

This idealized portrait reveals only one dimension of the nation's story – that which the British, and particularly the English, told themselves – for throughout the century, and particularly after the 1850s, Britain was also an aggressive warfare state committed to the use of violence to maintain commercial predominance and territorial expansion. Certainly it was during the 1890s that militarism became most evident, but throughout the century the essentially aggressive nature of the British was reflected as a powerful theme within popular culture, a culture which legitimized war, romanticized battle and portrayed the warrior as a masculine ideal. Britain's pacific self-image was possible because of the Victorians oft-repeated denunciation of aggression, and because they deluded themselves that their wars and punitive expeditions were fought only when absolutely necessary, and then for noble humanitarian reasons or to punish the wicked.

Such self-delusion was reinforced by the outwardly visible trappings of a society firmly dominated by 'civilianism':¹ the rejection of any form of military conscription, and denying the army any part in political decision-making.

Far from avoiding war, there was rarely a year when British soldiers were not in action somewhere in the world defending or extending their empire. It is certainly true that, despite the army's continual concern over recruitment, conscription was never introduced, but the voluntary system somehow always managed to produce just enough men for the nation's military requirements. So what need was there for an expensive compulsory system? Better by far to rely on a small but professional force of battle-hardened veterans. And while military leaders were indeed denied a voice in the councils of state, it might well be argued that, as the political and military elites shared the same background, assumptions, attitudes, interests and objectives, the aristo-military elite had little need for its own representatives. The Victorians oft-stated distaste for war and the soldier, and the exclusion of the military from politics, has disguised just how far war was generally accepted by much of society as central to the continued well-being of the nation.

War, as Linda Colley has pointed out, was the midwife of national unity. The hundred years of warfare which ended with Waterloo also witnessed the creation of the modern nation. 'Great Britain' was an invention forged above all by war. Time and time again, war with France brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England, into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it. They defined themselves as Protestants struggling for survival against the world's foremost Catholic power.²

Protestantism under threat, then, was the bedrock on which national identity was founded, breaking down sectarian and regional barriers and creating a powerful national unity. And because for over 200 years the 'Island Race' had successfully withstood the challenge of their powerful Catholic enemies, 'there developed a mystic belief among many Britons that in some way they had become the Chosen People; a shared understanding that they had inherited the special relationship with God first experienced by Old Testament Israel.'³ These convictions were particularly strong within the Evangelical movement – the most active branch of Anglicanism and a major influence on intellectual development during the nineteenth century.

The foundations of the Evangelical movement lay in traditional Puritanism, but, as Harold Perkin has pointed out, the nineteenth-century version was mutated and often remarkably secular, the only form of Christianity compatible with the selfish economic doctrine of competition.⁴ Evangelicals certainly wanted a 'moral' revolution at home, but their creed was inextricably linked with the

expansion of the empire and intertwined with nationalism and military activity. As John Wolffe has shown, extreme nationalism was a recurring theme in evangelical thought – a belief that while Britons enjoyed a privileged position in the ordered universe, they also had responsibilities to the less fortunate, particularly those thus far denied the word of God.⁵ Such ideas led to aggressive missionary activity and, of course, provided a divinely sanctioned underpinning for an imperialistic world view. These ideas were often expressed in popular hymns of the period:

'Tis to thy sovereign grace I owe
That I was born on British ground,
Where streams of heavenly mercy flow
and words of sweet salvation sound.

or,

And shall there not be Christians found
Who will for Christ appear;
To make a stand on heathen ground,
And preach salvation there.⁶

Aggressive nationalism, combined with a powerful belief in a religious and moral duty to the unenlightened, helped to justify war as an essential element in God's plan. The armed forces were the means by which the nation's unique relationship with the Almighty would be protected from Popery and other evils, while also ensuring that missionary activity could safely take place in dangerous heathen lands. This developing relationship between missionary and military was manifested in a number of ways through the nineteenth century, and particularly in the Evangelicals' mission to the army itself; a conscious attempt to create a Christian army by the introduction of scripture reading groups and 'conversion' of the rank and file. Such activity was rewarded by an increasing number of soldiers, both officers and men, who publicly proclaimed themselves to be 'warriors of Christ': John Greene's 1827 memoir of his service in the 68th Regiment, or William Surtees's account of his experiences with the Rifle Brigade (published in 1833), were certainly not the only occasions when soldier-authors declared themselves to be 'true soldiers of Christ'.⁷ They may well have been so; equally, they may simply have been expressing the sentiments they believed would please their readers. Either way, what they produced was powerful propaganda for the soldier as Christian warrior. The Church–military relationship can also be seen in the increasingly martial metaphors and imagery used by the religious and widely employed in sermons and popular hymns. It could be claimed that,

in an age where church attendance was in decline, particularly among the urban population, little weight should be given to this. However, as John Wolffe has argued, through sermons but above all through the Sunday School movement and City Missions, these nationalist-religious ideas gained a wide currency:

The real significance of evangelical views of the nation is to be found not in the relatively small number of people who would have espoused them in their entirety, but in the far larger numbers who imbibed portions of the evangelical creed and allowed its presuppositions to shape their subconscious.⁸

It seems likely that an unsophisticated, poorly educated audience missed the finer points of such teaching and its metaphorical meaning, and were left with only the obvious and the literal: that Britons were somehow a 'chosen' people destined to dominate the lesser races, that force was a legitimate activity in the cause of conversion, and the army an agent in the divine plan. These ideas may well have contributed to a somewhat idealized image of the soldier, but they undoubtedly had considerable influence on the country's political and commercial elites, and underpinned British expansion.

That Britain was able to establish a dynamic commercial economy in the late eighteenth century was in no small part due to the use of force, justified by a belief in the manifest destiny of the British race. The military maintained stability at home, which enabled industrial and commercial activity to take place while continually expanding the empire. Almost all of those engaged in trade benefited in some way from 'Britain's ruthless pursuit of colonial markets and from its intermittent struggle with the other main contender for imperial and commercial primacy, France'.⁹ British victories in a succession of late eighteenth-century wars brought enormous territorial gains – including Canada, the West Indies, southern Africa and substantial parts of the Indian sub-continent – and unlimited opportunities for commercial exploitation. These 'opportunities', of course, had been gained at the point of a sword, and the future would increasingly dictate that they would have to be held by the sword as well. As Linda Colley has pointed out, before the Seven Years War the empire had 'been small enough and homogeneous enough to seem reasonably compatible with the values that the British . . . believed they uniquely epitomised'.¹⁰ But the dramatic expansion in the period between 1763 and 1815 meant that the empire no longer comprised British emigrants, was no longer predominantly Protestant or even Christian, but now included diverse 'heathen' races most of whom had little liking for their new masters. If the commercial exploitation of this empire was the lifeblood of the British nation (and it was clearly so perceived by contemporaries), then it was

essential to hold that empire together, and only military force could ensure its survival. The importance of the developing ideology of imperialism in the early decades of the nineteenth century has too often been ignored or dismissed by historians, but as Martin Green, Patrick Brantlinger and others have revealed, the imperial dynamic was a powerful influence throughout the period.¹¹

While war was clearly necessary to maintain the empire and allow God's work to take place, it was also an obvious symbol of the power and prestige of the monarchy. British monarchs have historically been closely involved with their armies, but this was particularly true of the Hanoverians, who took great interest in military matters, redesigning military dress, ordering elaborate displays and appearing in uniform themselves – even Queen Victoria wore a military-style costume at army reviews.¹² Such a close relationship between monarch and military clearly helped to justify the activities of the army. But war also provided a means by which the patrician caste could ensure their survival in an age of revolution and social turmoil. As Linda Colley has noted:

All aristocracies have a strong military tradition, and for many British patricians the protracted warfare of this period was a godsend. It gave them a job and, more more important, a purpose, an opportunity to carry out what they had been trained to do since childhood: ride horses, fire guns, exercise their undoubted physical courage and tell other people what to do.¹³

The British aristocracy were able to convince themselves and others that they were an elite dedicated to serving the nation and prepared to sacrifice life and limb to achieve national greatness. The wonderful description of the guests at a royal levee in 1818, by the American ambassador, quoted by Colley, captures the awesome quality of aristo-military sacrifice:

'That's General Walker', I was told, 'pierced with bayonets, leading on the assault at Badajos'. And he, close by, tall but limping? 'Colonel Ponsonby, he was left for dead at Waterloo . . .' Then came one of like port, but deprived of a leg . . . and the whisper went, 'That's Lord Anglesea'. A fourth had been wounded at Seringapatam; a fifth at Talavera; some had suffered in Egypt; some in America. There were those who had received scars on the deck with Nelson; others who carried them from the days of Howe.¹⁴

Patrician military function was underlined by the wearing of uniform for both private and public occasions, and even extended into the realm of civil dress, where foppish silks gave way to less flamboyant clothes of quasi-military cut,¹⁵



1 Nineteenth-century uniforms emphasized the male physique. From a print of c. 1839.

while their heroism became the subject of battle paintings, prints, ballads and epic poetry. The sons of the aristocracy, and even the sons of the aspiring rich who could afford to buy a 'gentleman's' education for their offspring, went to public schools and universities where the curriculum was built around the classics – a 'constant diet of stories of war, empire, bravery and sacrifice . . . and exuding a lush appreciation of masculine heroism'.¹⁶ Even uniforms were designed to draw attention to the wearer's masculinity: headgear to exaggerate height, short tight jackets with epaulettes to emphasize the width of the shoulders and tight-fitting trousers to demonstrate slim hips and strong legs (illus. 1). Thus the heroic virtues of war and the soldier were continually reinforced and even more widely disseminated with the rapid growth of the public school system later in the century. War, then, was central to the continued existence of the nation and of the patrician elite, but it was also a subject of considerable interest for the common people.

It has often been suggested that the British public had little interest in war and the soldier until late in the nineteenth century, and that most of the population was indifferent to such activities. However, as Colley and others have shown, even eighteenth-century conflicts were a focus of public interest.¹⁷ The long-drawn-out

wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France were even more a source of national pride, and victories were celebrated in songs, paintings, prints, poetry, statues and spectacle. This recurring imagery helped to create a more positive view of the army, as Geoffrey Best has noted: 'the common soldier and his trade were a bit better respected, not to mention better publicised, after the war than before it'.¹⁸ Despite isolated incidents (Edward Spiers, for example, cites the cavalier treatment of the 30th Regiment by the citizens of Ramsgate on its return from Waterloo), most soldier memoirs record an enthusiastic welcome on their return from the wars. Sir George Bell was 'feted, feasted, and flattered' in Dublin and many of the rank and file testify to the same treatment.¹⁹

While most praise was lavished on naval heroes, especially Nelson, attention was also paid to the exploits of the soldier, particularly in the Peninsula campaign and at Waterloo. Waterloo Day was an annual celebration until mid-century, and the Duke of Wellington, Sir John Moore and others were acclaimed as national heroes, joining a succession of popular military icons that reached back to the Duke of Marlborough, Clive of India and Wolfe of Quebec. Memories of the war and of the soldier's role were maintained through a steady stream of veterans' diaries, memoirs and autobiographies, many written by the rank and file, which found a ready market and testify to public interest in the wars. Paintings commemorating the war and the military were, as Joan Hichberger has shown, never as popular in Britain as in France.²⁰ Nevertheless, there were numerous battle sketches, costume studies and cheap woodblock prints available from printsellers at the lower end of the art market, which indicate the popularity of heroic images glorifying the battle experience. Plays, pageants and spectacles also reflected the public interest. Until about 1812, naval dramas dominated; the Sadlers Wells spectaculars, for example, culminated with huge battles between model ships and played to substantial audiences.²¹ However, from that time onwards military themes became extremely popular, clearly demonstrating pride in the exploits of Wellington's army. Even as late as 1824, Astley's Amphitheatre in Birmingham played J. H. Amherst's spectacular production, *The Battle of Waterloo*, boasting a cast of more than 200 and elaborate and 'novel' effects. The century of warfare that ended with Waterloo thus created great interest in war and the exploits of military heroes, and this was encouraged during the post-war period by an increasing use of the theme of war in popular culture.

The twenty years or so after 1815 saw Britain at its most pacific. This was partly due to war weariness after the prolonged struggle with France,²² and partly, as Cain and Hopkins have argued, because the 'costs of war had escalated the national debt to a point where it was threatening to topple the structure it was

supposed to support'. This led to a move to bring public expenditure under control and generate extra revenue. Governments became committed to a new overseas development that mobilized the empire while also moving towards free trade.²³ Cutting defence costs was one means of saving money, and the military budget was reduced from £43 million in 1815 to less than £8 million by 1836, which further enhanced the self-image of a peace-loving nation. Such savings were possible because Europe was settled, and foreign policy depended upon the idea of a balance of power developed by Castlereagh and Canning. While the Royal Navy guarded trade routes, only a small army was necessary to maintain order at home and deal with rebellion abroad. However, the army was also engaged in several wars of expansion, for example in Nepal (1814–16), the Second Maratha War (1817–18) and the Second Burmese War (1824–26), which added considerable territory to the empire. Even in a period of 'peace', the nation still engaged in considerable military activity. But from the 1830s, increasing trade competition from America and Europe made the search for new markets an urgent priority, and this, combined with depression and discontent at home, forced governments to develop a more aggressive imperial policy. Palmerston, like many others, was concerned to find overseas solutions to domestic problems.²⁴ In 1860, he reflected that 'trade ought not to be enforced by cannon balls, but on the other hand trade cannot flourish without security, and that security may often be unobtainable without the exhibition of physical force'.²⁵ During the first half of the century it was not just a question of a 'show of force', but of using aggression to create trade 'opportunities'. This was clearly shown by events in the late 1830s and early '40s.

In India in 1838, for example, the Viceroy, Lord Auckland, fearful that upheavals in Afghanistan would unsettle the frontier regions, attempted to depose the Amir and install a puppet regime in Kabul backed by British troops. That the attempt misfired and resulted in the loss of a British army of 4,500 (including 700 Britons) during the retreat from Kabul in 1842, does not detract from an inherently aggressive policy designed to secure northern India. Around the same time, British policy towards China demonstrates even more clearly a willingness to resort to war to secure national advantage. China offered enormous potential for trade, but the Chinese had little interest in what the British had to offer – except opium. Despite edicts from the Chinese government forbidding the trade in opium, the East India Company persisted. In 1839, relations with China became so strained that Palmerston ordered a blockade of the Chinese coast and the seizure of Hong Kong as a base for operations. When even this failed to achieve the desired result, the British resorted to war, eventually forcing the Chinese to negotiate.²⁶ Under the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the Chinese were forced to

open their ports to British trade. While some Victorians expressed moral doubts about British policy in China, majority opinion, with some hypocrisy, saw the war as morally justified, fought not for sordid commercial gain, but to bring enlightenment to the heathen. A report in the *Illustrated London News* clearly expressed this view:

The Chinese war was not a war of mighty prowess, it was not a war of trophy, vanity, and pride, but it was a great war for mankind. It opened the eyes of millions of human beings who were buried in the dark recesses of idolatry and unfurled the wings of commerce . . . It shed the glorious gleam of Christianity upon an almost pagan world.²⁷

While civilians might need to salve a tender conscience with religious cant, soldiers were often less circumspect. In 1843, for example, just before Sind was conquered and added to British India on the pretext of pacifying the region, the commander of the British forces, Sir Charles Napier, said 'we have no right to seize Sind, yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, humane, and useful piece of rascality it will be'. Napier believed, as did many others of his generation, that the 'great recipe for quieting a country is a good thrashing first and great kindness afterwards: the wildest chaps are thus tamed'.²⁸ Thrashing the Baluchis was ultimately for their own good, putting them under British rule and exposing them to the civilizing influence of Christian Britons! The Baluchis, incidentally, were very soundly thrashed, since Napier and his troops, in the general's own words, 'butchered' over 6,000 of them. Yet even Napier was unable to rid himself completely of contemporary hypocrisy and was still able to consider his actions 'humane'. Popular illustrations of these wars constantly emphasized the ferocious and 'outlandish' appearance of the enemy, and reinforced ideas of their racial inferiority when compared with their 'civilized' conquerors (illus. 2). This acceptance of aggression and brutality was continually demonstrated by politicians like Palmerston, who could suggest that, 'half-civilized governments [needed] . . . a dressing [down] every eight or ten years to keep them in order', and even with the major powers a show of force was a necessary thing: 'Diplomats and protocols', he once remarked, 'are very good things, but there are no better peace-keepers than well-appointed three-deckers' [ships].²⁹

Clearly Victorian governments never really subscribed to their oft-repeated peaceful policies. To believe that they did, as David French has pointed out, is to mistake the rhetoric of a handful of politicians like Richard Cobden and the Manchester School for the reality of government, as most politicians 'were quite capable of pursuing simultaneously both what they conceived to be Britain's national interests and high moral principles'.³⁰ Thus, for all their much-vaunted



2 'The Other': Afghan warriors, 1880.

humanitarian aims and peaceful commercial objectives, the Victorians inherited, accepted and considerably extended an empire held together by force of arms, and, as we shall see, were prepared to unleash terrifying retribution upon those foolish enough to resist. War, the controlled use of violence, was simply one means by which the British maintained their position in the world.³¹

This tendency to resort so easily to war, to employ organized violence for commercial gain, inevitably created a crisis of conscience for some. How

could these self-proclaimed champions of freedom equate their role as imperial warlords with their professed claims of being peaceful traders? This moral dilemma was never wholly resolved, and was reflected in the pacifist movement – a diverse collection of individuals and associations who could unashamedly renounce war and aggression.³² But these dissenters were always a minority, and subtle propaganda and appeals to patriotism could usually isolate them even further from the mainstream of political life. Most nineteenth-century men and women could quote the Evangelical creed and justify the increasing use of military force as ‘necessary for the greater good’, and ‘Heaven’s Command’ to spread Christianity and civilization. Bolstered during the later nineteenth century by a developing racist ideology and appeals to the biological necessity of war (see below), it became increasingly easy to morally justify virtually any act of aggression. And the acceptance of war was undoubtedly made easier by the rediscovery of chivalry early in the century.

As Mark Girouard has explained, chivalry, the code of behaviour evolved for medieval warriors, softened the potential barbarity of war by ‘putting it into the hands of men committed to high standards of behaviour’ and noble ideals: ‘The ideal knight was brave, loyal, true to his word, courteous, generous and merciful. He defended the Church and wrongfully oppressed but respected and honoured his enemies in war, as long as they obeyed the same code he did’.³³

Chivalry, then, removed the most brutal elements of war by creating a strict moral code for the warrior – the generally accepted ‘rules of war’. The nineteenth-century interest in chivalry was, in large measure, due to the popular historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, particularly *Ivanhoe* (1820) and *Quentin Durward* (1823), which helped shape the heroic chivalric stereotype. Scott himself was not blind to the less noble aspects of the Middle Ages, for example, the fanaticism and superstition, but while he saw chivalry as something of the past, other writers, in their tales of the Crusades, translations of medieval romances and histories of chivalry saw it as something vital and relevant for contemporary society. Chivalry gave women an honourable place in society (while of course defining them as weak and in need of protection), provided an education for young men calculated to imbue them with physical strength, bravery, grace, courtesy and respect for women, but, above all, it dignified the conduct of war, essential for a ‘civilized’ society in an ‘enlightened’ age.³⁴ The most important of the didactic works on chivalry was Kenholm Digby’s *The Broad Stone of Honour*, published in 1823. Digby’s book, subtitled ‘Rules for the Gentlemen of England’, provided guidance, through historical example, for the conduct of gentlemen. As the author states, to be born a gentleman is a ‘high privilege’, but implicit in such privilege are obligations both to self and society.³⁵ Here

Digby clearly echoes contemporary ideas about national identity, allegiance to the state and the teaching of nationalistic evangelicalism.

In the 1820s, interest in chivalry was limited to social elites, but it was soon taken up by middle-class journalists and novelists and its values were disseminated throughout society. Indeed, at a time of rapid change and social instability it is not difficult to see the nostalgic appeal of a more ordered period, when kingship and the church were unquestioned and when all knew and accepted their place in the scheme of things. The chivalric code was later adopted by Charles Kingsley (a self-proclaimed 'joyous Knight-errant of God') and Thomas Hughes and would provide the underpinning for the cult of 'Muscular Christianity' – the cornerstone of reformed public school education. Chivalry appealed to a diverse audience, from Prince Albert to the radical William Morris and the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (whose paintings would disseminate an idealized and romantic reconstruction of the medieval world); and to churchmen, teachers and the aspiring middle classes. It was interpreted as the guide for behaviour of a 'true gentlemen' and appropriate for civilian life. Scott and the other exponents of chivalry created, as Martin Green has perceptively argued, romantic daydreams and illusions, an alternative to the 'banks, counting houses and trading companies most readers saw as contemporary reality'.³⁶ What is relevant here is that, above all, chivalry was the way of the warrior – a para-military code of conquest and inherently aggressive.³⁷ As the knights of the Middle Ages were idealized as Christian warriors doing battle for a noble cause, so logic dictated that the chivalric warrior of the nineteenth century would likewise only take up arms in a righteous cause. And what could be more just and righteous than the defence of the realm – God's chosen people – or to defend Protestantism and assist missionary activity in heathen lands?³⁸ Digby clearly stresses the connection. In the section of his book exploring honourable professions for those who wish to conduct themselves according to the chivalric code, the army, a 'noble calling', features strongly:

The great advantage of the profession of arms, is its practical influence, the effect which it produces upon the character; and this, you will remember, is the criterion by which we should judge of all professions and modes of employment. The soldier is religious and brave, humane and merciful, open-hearted and just, frank, sincere, faithful and firm . . . The lamb and flag were borne by the knight templers, to signify the union of these qualities, of gentleness with the martial spirit.³⁹

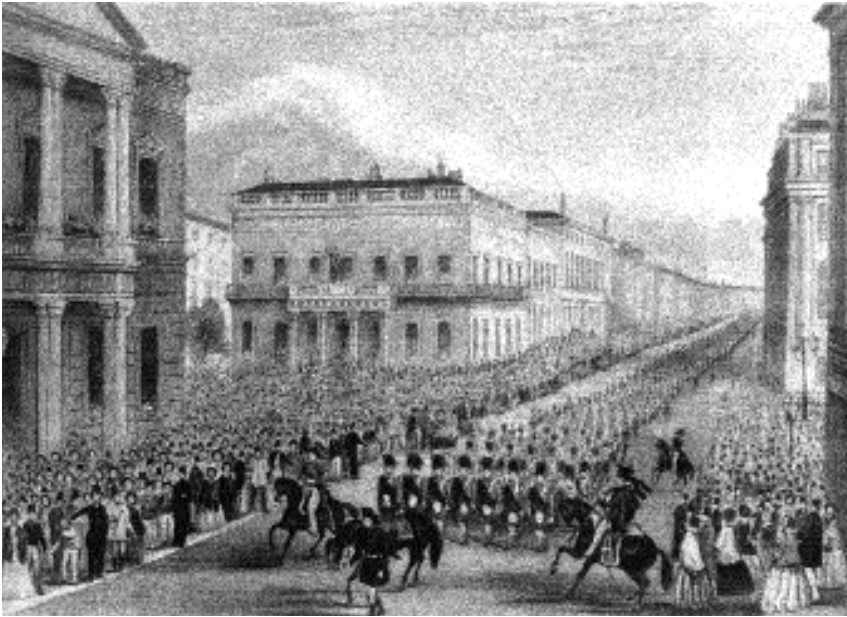
While some soldiers appear to contradict this opinion – Frederick the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte, for example – these are exceptions to the general rule:

The soldier is often deficient in learning, but is frequently more religious without hypocrisy, and most sound in his judgement . . . his piety will be sincere. Like the centurion of the Acts, like the grand master of the order of St John, the saviour of Rhodes . . . like a Bayard, a Hopton, or a Falkland, he will be devout towards God, and benevolent to man.

Digby ends the section on the profession of arms by reminding his readers that, 'Still there is a holy war, still it is our duty to engage in it . . .'⁴⁰ The author thus merges the concept of the chivalric warrior and the evangelical zealot into a new, and ideal image – the new crusader for empire. As Jeffrey Richards has explained, the 'Chivalric ideal was deliberately promoted by key figures of the age in order to produce a ruling elite for the nation and for the expanding empire who would be inspired by noble and selfless values,'⁴¹ including, we might add, the martial spirit. Most Victorian gentlemen, of course, saw little attraction in a military career, but heroic images of chivalric warriors offered a pleasing and exciting fantasy, an antidote to the tedium of everyday life.

This public interest in war was, in large part, made possible because after 1745 the nation's battles were fought on foreign fields; even the upheavals of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were played out on a stage far removed from native shores. The civilian population of Britain was thus spared the horrors visited upon the inhabitants of France, Spain and other warring states and could distance itself from the reality of battle and enjoy the vicarious excitements of war. Real but distant wars were thus little different from the exciting stories reconstructed for the theatre or in the words of storytellers and balladmongers. Thus was born what Graham Dawson has called 'the pleasure culture of war' – the reconstruction of war for entertainment.⁴² And, as Myerly notes, the army itself was very much a 'theatrical' institution: uniforms, manoeuvres, flags and stirring music were all part of a spectacle designed to arouse the soldier to courageous acts and intimidate the enemy.⁴³ At home, reviews and parades enhanced the prestige of the state but were regarded by the people as entertainment and were enormously popular. In 1830, for example, to celebrate the accession of William IV, three grand reviews were held in London. All drew huge crowds, as did military entertainments later in the century (illus. 3). It was a short step from public enjoyment of this kind of military entertainment to enjoying the entertainment provided by war – it was after all, just another military spectacle! The radical Douglas Jerrold was well aware of the dangers of portraying the essential brutality of war as theatre:

When nations . . . cut each others throats . . . we must have red coats and muskets and sabres; but seeing how that the duty of their bearers squares



3 Military occasions provided entertainment for the public: a print of the funeral of the Duke of Wellington, 1852.

neither with our innate good sense, nor our notions of what ought to be – we are fain to gild the matter over – to try to conceal, from ourselves, the butchering nature of the business we are sometimes forced to undertake, and so spring up military spectacle – military finery – military music . . . Clothe war therefore in gayer colours than peace . . . let the steel which cuts glitter like valued gems; the evolutions which destroy, be graceful as the motions of dancing girls.⁴⁴

The pleasure culture of war reflected national interest in war, but recreating it as exciting and romantic spectacle distanced the public from the brutality and provided a forum through which moral uncertainties over the use of violence could be partially resolved. In the pleasure culture of war, battles were fought far away; they were never unjust, but fought for high moral purpose by chivalrous volunteers who performed their killing function according to the well-defined rules of war, and, of course, the majority of casualties were to be found among the Other – the uncivilized and outlandish foreigner. The notion of war as entertaining spectacle made conflict even more acceptable and attractive, and from the 1830s, as a genuinely mass popular culture began to develop, war became an increasingly popular theme.

In 1838 the *New Monthly* magazine serialized an account of the military exploits of Major Goliah O'Grady Gahagan during the Second Maratha War of 1803. Gahagan, who by his own estimate was 'worth at least a thousand Indian combatants', is the ultimate martial hero: 'I sheared off three hundred and nine heads in the course of a single campaign', he boasts.⁴⁵ *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, by William Makepeace Thackeray, is of course, a mock-epic, a satire on the very popular martial adventures written by novelists such as Frederick Chamier, Edward Howard and others; the type of heroic fiction that through the 1830s provided the staple fare for *Metropolitan* magazine and populist publishing houses. The very fact that Thackeray could create a successful satire on the martial story testifies to the widespread popularity of the sub-genre. Thackeray was by no means a pacifist, but realized, as Brantlinger has noted, that the 'theme of "the indomitable majesty of BRITISH VALOUR"' could be taken to ridiculous extremes.⁴⁶ Even Charles Dickens commented cynically on this belief in national achievement through martial valour. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, for example, the politician Mr Gregsbury exclaims at one point:

... Whether I look merely at home, or, stretching my eye farther, contemplate the boundless prospect of conquest and possession – achieved by British perseverance and British valour – I clasp my hands, and turning my eyes to the broad expanse above my head, exclaim, 'thank Heaven, I am a Briton'.⁴⁷

The vast majority of martial novels of the period never made it into the canon of Victorian literature and have been virtually lost. Like other cultural artefacts, however, they not only reflected public interest in war, but helped to establish positive notions of violence by turning combat into an entertaining moral crusade and creating heroic images of the warrior.

The tone of these military adventures was largely influenced by the very successful novels of Captain Frederick Marryatt, the leading exponent of the naval romance – exciting stories of daring young Britons set during the French wars. What is important in his fiction is the deeply ingrained themes of 'patriotism and martial valour', which provide a 'nostalgic, swashbuckling, but also conservative contrast to the literature of social reform . . .'.⁴⁸ Marryatt's heroes are full-blooded warriors, fighting the just war. While his early novels dealt with naval themes, he later moved into other territory: his best-remembered novel is probably *Children of the New Forest* (1847), a romance of the Civil War and of heroic and chivalric cavaliers. However, his other novels have relevance here. The 1844 tale of the adventures of an immigrant family, *The Settlers in Canada*, makes clear his admiration for aggressive masculinity. The Sioux Indians, who

make life difficult for the settlers, rank highly in the author's hierarchy of race because they are 'savage and warlike' and therefore admirable (they are defeated only by the superior fighting skills of the British!). And Patrick Brantlinger has pointed to other races which received the Marryatt stamp of racial approval precisely because they have outstanding martial characteristics: the Ashanti, the Zulu and the Burman. In his tale of South Africa, *The Mission* (1846), he discusses the 'Caffres' – a fine, warlike race with Hottentot blood in their veins.⁴⁹ Clearly, then, for Marryatt and other contemporary writers, real masculinity depended upon the qualities of the warrior. What is interesting here, of course, is that later in the century the acceptance of Social Darwinist thought would legitimize this racial hierarchy as scientific fact.

By the 1840s, then, this idealized masculine image began to influence the popular representation of the soldier, which was disseminated through novels, poems and reports by now forgotten authors. Sir Francis Doyle, for instance, a popular and successful poet and eventually professor of poetry at Oxford, was frequently inspired by war and the nobility of the soldier-hero. In the aftermath of the Sind campaign he published several works based on stories related to him by General Charles Napier. Here heroic deeds are not exclusive to the officer class, and in 'The Red Thread of Honour', for example, he praises the rankers:

Eleven men of England
 A breastwork charged in vain;
 Eleven men of England
 Lie stripped, and gashed, and slain.
 Slain; but of their foes that guarded
 Their rock-built fortress well,
 Some twenty had been mastered,
 When the last soldier fell.⁵⁰

The poem goes on to explain that it was the custom of the heathens to bind the wrist of a dead hero with red thread, but for these brave men of England, both wrists were bound – a double honour for the valiant, fearless Britons. Doyle's later works are rich in references to the Christian soldier – the private, captured by the foe but who refuses to bow before them in order to save his life, declaring he would only honour God and the Queen in such a fashion:

. . . So let his name through Europe ring –
 A man of mean estate,
 Who died, as firm as Sparta's king,
 Because his soul was great . . .⁵¹

The sinking of the troopship *Birkenhead* off the African coast in February 1852 became a frequently cited example in the cult of the soldier-hero. Having put the women and children into the available lifeboats, the soldiers formed up on deck and heroically went down with the ship singing hymns. Their courage was celebrated in a variety of epic poems, and was used as an example of 'Muscular Christianity' in Thomas Hughes's later didactic text, *The Manliness of Christ*. But one of the first poems based on the incident appeared within weeks of the disaster. 'The Birkenhead', by Sir Henry Yule, set the tone for many later accounts. The poet rhetorically asks his audience, 'who were these heroes'? 'Ordinary men', he answers:

... Weavers from the stocking-frame;
Boys from the plough; cornets with beardless chin
But steeped in honour and in discipline . . .

So give thanks, the poet tells us for:

These undegenerate sons who sank
Aboard the Birkenhead . . .⁵²

Clearly, these 'ordinary' men had been reared in the chivalric warrior tradition and knew the sacrifice expected of them. Nor were such noble images exclusive to poets and storytellers, for soldiers themselves played a part in the creation of their heroic image. In late 1842, troops under the command of General Sir William Nott were accused of 'excesses and outrages and looting' during the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The good general mounted a vigorous defence of his men which was published in the British press and, for good measure, he accompanied his correspondence with an epic poem extolling the virtues of his 'Christian' soldiers:

When the savage came with his traitor's eyes –
Wild – furious – mad for gore,
They looked – fought – smiled – and all was done,
They conquered and forebore.
No blood of triumph stained the soil
Where'er my soldiers trod,
For 'mid the madness of turmoil
They kept a thought of God . . .
Yet discipline and mercy joined
To keep the Christians back;
They did not let the bloodhound slip,
They would not swarm his track.

They bade fierce, fiery passion yield
 To mercy's gentle rein,
 And so our British soldiers raised
 Their glory above gain . . .⁵³

Such ideas were not only found in literature but were common in other cultural forms. The theatre is a good example. During the Sind campaign, Astley's Amphitheatre was playing 'Crusaders of Jerusalem', an epic production noted for the finale where the Christian warrior Richard the Lion Heart fights a single combat with the Prince of Darkness, Saladin. Even more popular with the middle and respectable working classes from the late 1830s were the elaborate pyrodramas staged at Manchester's Belle Vue or the Surrey Pleasure Gardens. Pyrodramas were open-air evening entertainments, dramatic reconstructions of famous battles, sieges or heroic episodes from British history, which climaxed with bonfires and spectacular firework displays.⁵⁴ If we add to these entertainments the reviews, parades, ceremonies and royal occasions in which the army performed, it is clear just how far war had become a powerful theme in popular culture.⁵⁵

Thus in 1848, when Thackeray published *Vanity Fair*, the author made it explicit that it was the qualities of the soldier which earn a man the admiration of society:

What qualities are there for which a man gets so speedy a return for applause, as those of bodily superiority, activity and valour? Time out of mind strength and courage have been the theme of bards and romances; and from the story of Troy down to today, poetry has always chosen a soldier for a hero. I wonder is it because men are cowards in heart that they admire bravery so much, and place military valour so far beyond every other quality for reward and worship?⁵⁶

Much has been written about society's negative attitude towards the army,⁵⁷ but, like much of the Victorians' mindset, their attitude to the soldier is paradoxical and ambiguous. Here we must be careful to draw a distinction between officers and the rank and file, because officers were respected, admired and had considerable social status. The army's role as the main agent of social control at home during the early part of the century certainly led to radicals criticizing the ordinary soldier as a brutal agent of repression. Among the rest of the population, we have been told, the reputation of the rank and file was little better; soldiers were often regarded as bullying rascals who terrified honest citizens, and respectable families were shamed when a son 'went for a soldier'.⁵⁸ Few working men would willingly enlist, and the army was under strength for much of the century. Even among the well-to-do, the potential officer class,

the crudities and dangers of military life and the purchase system, which ensured that only the wealthy or influential gained promotion, meant that most middle-class men had little interest in a military career. This reluctance to serve has often been cited as evidence of society's anti-militarism, yet the reality is more prosaic. While there may well have been a certain political incorrectness about enlisting among the more politicized working classes, the simple truth was that going for a soldier had little to offer; conditions of service were so unattractive and the dangers so great that the army simply had little appeal as a trade. Even as late as the beginning of the twentieth century, the Secretary of State for War, H. O. Arnold-Foster, writing of the continual problem of recruitment, pointed out that '... if there be too great a contrast between the amenities and decencies of life which he is compelled to live as a soldier and those of the life to which he is accustomed as a civilian, he will not become a soldier.'⁵⁹ And, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the ferocious discipline and appalling conditions inflicted on the rank and file made those contrasts even more dramatic.

However, this reluctance to enlist should not be taken as evidence of the peace-loving nature of the British people, nor of their abhorrence of war and soldiering. It may well be that much of this negative view of the soldier resulted from radical-pacifist propaganda. We need to remember that during the early decades of the century less than one per cent of the male population had direct experience of military life; the army was small and usually far away. Soldiers were used to maintain order during times of civil unrest, but these were usually local affairs. Most people, it would seem, had little real contact with the military, and this distance between soldier and civilian may well have given the soldier an exotic and romantic appeal. There is certainly evidence to suggest considerable public interest in the veterans' tales of military adventure.⁶⁰ And as one officer noted in the early 1830s:

The radical and leveling press ... has for years directed [its] fiercest attacks against the British army, but has not yet been able to destroy, or even weaken its popularity: the failure may seem strange to some but ... there is an honest manliness of feeling about the people of Britain that makes them delight in even the contemplation of deeds of hardihood and danger; and makes them proud of the unrivaled achievements of their sons, brothers and countrymen, as well as of the country that produced, and of the institutions that fostered such men ...⁶¹

The soldier, then, may perhaps have been a less reviled figure than we have been led to believe. Nevertheless, while much of society subscribed to an idealized

notion of the 'Christian' warrior and while some soldiers might proclaim themselves as such, the reality was that the army was still an imperfect tool for a nation that believed itself motivated by divine inspiration and high moral purpose. However, the importance of the events of the 1850s, the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny was that they provided dynamic examples of the Christian warrior in action – the idealized image given flesh and blood and fighting the just war.

Initiatives to turn rank and file into a Christian brotherhood had begun as early as the 1820s, when the Naval and Military Bible Society forced the authorities to provide £800 a year for prayer books, Bibles and religious tracts for troops in an attempt to improve their spiritual life. Missionary activity was undertaken in garrison towns such as Woolwich and Chatham,⁶² and recreation rooms and libraries for enlisted men were created as an alternative to the doxy and the grog shop. But it was the war in the Crimea that created enormous public sympathy for the army, as Olive Anderson has explained:

It was undoubtedly the Crimean War which began a dramatic change in the attitude towards the army of British society in general, and of the religious public in particular. For the first time troops were hailed as 'the people's army', and idealized notions of what they were fighting for, together with unparalleled public identification with their hardships before Sebastopol, combined to give them an immense emotional appeal.⁶³

More important than engendering mere sympathy for the suffering of the rank and file, was the manner in which the war impacted upon the mind of the nation and created the idea of the army as the instrument of the nation's will.

Throughout the 1840s, Britain's relations with Russia had been marked by mutual suspicion, and most Britons viewed the Tsar as a tyrannical and despotic ruler. Thus, in October 1853, when the Turkish government declared war on Russia in order to preserve its geographical integrity, British public opinion was firmly on the side of the Turks. The Anglo–French declaration of war in March 1854 was greeted with enthusiasm in Britain, and even radicals and liberals could lend their support to what was generally perceived as a moral crusade to defend a weak, oppressed nation against tyranny. 'The War is popular beyond belief', noted the Queen, and effigies of Bright, Cobden and other critics were burnt in the streets of Manchester, as workers who professed to despise Russian absolutism took to the streets 'shouting slogans and singing patriotic songs'.⁶⁴ But the expeditionary force sent to the Crimean peninsula soon became bogged down, and more troops began to die from disease than from Russian bullets.

At this point the British public began to identify with its 'suffering heroes' to an unprecedented degree, largely because of the manner in which the popular press reported the war.

After the removal of stamp duty on newspapers in 1836, the press in Britain developed rapidly. Technical improvements meant that by 1851 there were no fewer than 563 newspapers in circulation.⁶⁵ The calotype printing process of the 1840s enabled illustrations to be used, and by 1842 the first fully illustrated weekly was on the market (the *Illustrated London News*). So too, the growth of railways and the electric telegraph meant that news could be transmitted more rapidly than ever before. War, of course, had always been a major ingredient for newspapers, but war news had been gathered in a fairly haphazard manner. Traditionally, the British press borrowed from Continental papers or employed junior officers as correspondents to send dispatches from the front. These were neither exciting nor enlightening, and invariably arrived long after the events described. However, in February 1854 *The Times* took the dramatic step of employing William Russell, a freelance correspondent, to accompany the British forces to the Crimea. As Philip Knightley has pointed out, Russell's reports, written as 'letters to the Editor', marked the beginning of an organized method of reporting wars for the civilian population at home,⁶⁶ and in the process ended the remoteness of war by giving events an immediacy that made civilians feel a part of the experience.

Russell was soon joined by other correspondents, and their reports, sent home by fast steamship, brought the war news rapidly to the public, excited interest in the doings of the military and created demand for more news. Although Russell and the others were not slow to reveal the appalling suffering of the ill-equipped British soldiers and the inadequacy of medical facilities provided for the sick and wounded, they were equally determined to reveal the soldier's nobility and heroism. 'A thin red streak topped with steel', wrote Russell of the 93rd Highlanders facing the Russian onslaught at Balaclava; and the 'sheer steel and sheer courage' of the Heavy Brigade, 'in all the pride and splendour of war'. His literary image of the heroes in action combined to fire the imagination of the reading public and glorify the experience of war. The suffering of the army drew a sympathetic humanitarian response from the public, while the guts-and-glory reports had an immediacy and excitement which powerfully reinforced ideas about the heroic nature of the rank and file. The reputation of the soldier, a Christian warrior in a righteous war, was further enhanced by an item of hagiographical literature which had 'exceptional impact' on the public imagination.⁶⁷

Catherine Marsh's account of the life and heroic death of a young Christian soldier. *The Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars* (1856), was clearly intended to

inspire other young men to emulate the hero, for, as the author noted in the preface, 'Most grateful to God will the writer be, if the courage of any such be exalted and confirmed, and their manly hearts inspired to emulate the noble example of a CHRISTIAN SOLDIER'.⁶⁸ Marsh told the story of a young officer who, after enjoying the gaiety and idleness of garrison life in the West Indies, was converted to true Christianity in 1851. Vicars, however, despite his new role as a Christian zealot, found little to conflict with his duties as a soldier and, indeed, spent much time in spreading the Gospel among his men. In November 1854 his regiment was sent to the Crimea. The following March, Vicars was commanding an outpost in the lines before Sebastopol when his position was attacked by a large Russian force. Bravely, he ordered his men to counter-attack:

With his first war shout, 'Now 97th. on your pins, and charge!' Himself foremost in the conflict, he led on his gallant men to victory, charging two thousand with a force of barely two hundred. A bayonet wound in the breast only fired his courage the more; and again his voice rose high, 'Men of the 97th, Follow me!' as he leaped the parapet he had so well defended, and charged the enemy down the ravine.⁶⁹

Vicars died from his wounds soon after the engagement, but Lord Raglan's dispatch, published on 6 April, noted the part played by Vicars in the defence of the position, 'I am assured that nothing could be more distinguished than the gallantry and good example which he set to the detachment under his command'.⁷⁰ Vicars's story had, as Anderson has pointed out, an enormous contemporary appeal: 70,000 copies were sold in the first year of publication and the volume remained in print until the 1914–18 war.⁷¹ *The Memorials* created an exciting but sympathetic portrait of the Christian soldier and offered documentary proof that a real soldier could live and die as nobly as the chivalric ideal.

The Crimean War was featured widely in stage dramas and spectacles. At Belle Vue, George Dawson's production, *The Siege of Sebastopol*, was performed in 1855, and the following season the venue offered *The Storming of the Malakoff and the Redan*, which, according to David Mayer, brought cries of alarm from women in the audience as 'an occasional stuffed soldier was hurled over the ramparts'.⁷² The events of the war were reconstructed as drama and in epic poetry such as Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade'. More important in disseminating the noble idea of a 'peoples' army' were visual images of the soldier. Interest in the war was such that the *Illustrated London News* sent a number of artists to the Crimea, including Constantin Guys, Edward Goodall and Joseph Archer Crowe; while the London print-seller Colnaghi took the unprecedented



4 A war correspondent pays tribute to British dead in the Crimea, 1855.

step of sending William Simpson to produce pictures suitable for lithographic reproduction. In 1855, Colnaghi published 80 of his pictures in a double folio, *The Seat of the War in the East*, which included imaginative reconstructions of the charges of the Light and Heavy Brigades.⁷³ Nor were these war illustrators reluctant to take a neutral stance, since for all their criticism of the military authorities they were anxious to be seen as patriots and participants. Joseph Archer Crowe's sketch for the *Illustrated London News* (3 February 1855) is a useful example. Entitled *Our artist on the Battlefield of Inkerman*, it shows Crowe, head bowed and holding the reins of his horse, gazing in silent tribute at the heroic British dead (illus. 4).

The Crimean campaign was also the first war to be photographed. Agnews of Manchester sent out the well-known photographer Roger Fenton, and eventually published over 300 scenes of trench and camp life and portraits. The limitations of early photographic equipment meant that battle scenes were impossible. Thus Fenton could only reveal posed and sanitized images of the campaign, a relatively 'cosy' view of the war (illus. 5). Nor would editors wish to offend the susceptibilities of their readers with graphic images of the horrors of battle. Nevertheless, the effect of such images on the public should not be underestimated, for they were first photographic record of an army at war. More important was the series of cullodians by Cundall and Howlett, 'Crimean Heroes'. These featured officers and enlisted men who had distinguished themselves in battle: many, in fact, had been awarded the new but highly coveted award for bravery, the Victoria Cross. The importance of these studies, together with artist Louis Desange's series



5 Roger Fenton:
a posed photo-
graph of a
trench scene in
the Crimea,
c. 1855.

of portraits of holders of the Victoria Cross, was to demonstrate how ordinary men, often of humble origin, had shown exceptional qualities in action (illus. 6). Nobility under fire was clearly no longer confined to the aristocratic officer class. It was frequently noted that some 90 NCOs had been commissioned during the war. Even *The Times* wrote of Alma and Inkerman as ‘soldiers’ victories’, and remarked upon the ‘religious feeling’ in the correspondence it had received from enlisted men. As Spiers has noted, the ‘patient fatalism of the ranks as they endured the hardships of the camp before Sebastopol had aroused immense emotional feeling, an unprecedented interest in their plight and welfare.’⁷⁴

The revelations of Russell and other correspondents about the incompetence of the military high command drew attention to the scandalous conditions, and stimulated a general demand for army reform as well as extensive public interest in military affairs. Above all, the Crimean War, a triumph over Russian tyranny, reinforced the idea that Britain’s wars were legitimate, even righteous, activities. The warlike mood of the nation was reflected in the election of 1857, when Cobden and Bright, the most outspoken critics of the war, both lost their seats, while the role of the army as an essential tool of national policy was made clear by Lord Panmure, Secretary of State for War, in 1855:

I trust our present experience will prove to our countrymen that our army must be something more than a mere colonial guard or home police; that it must be the means of maintaining our name abroad’ and causing it to be respected in peace as well as admired and dreaded in war.⁷⁵

These ideas were dramatically reinforced two years later when native troops mutinied in India.



6 'The Heroes of the Crimea': Colour-Sergeants McGregor and Staunton, 1856.

The revolt of sepoy regiments at Meerut and elsewhere in May 1857, and their subsequent capture of Delhi, was perceived as a major challenge to British rule in India – an heroic struggle in which fewer than 40,000 British soldiers faced the wrath of the Indian population. In reality, the Mutiny was the result of British arrogance, insensitivity and flagrant attempts to ride roughshod over Indian religious practices and traditions. Many Indian regiments remained loyal, and the mutineers represented only a tiny fraction of the population of the sub-continent. Yet, as Olive Anderson has pointed out:

The dramatic circumstances of that event, and particularly its suddenness and ferocity and the fact that women and children were involved, quickly created a climate of hysterical tension at home. Among many of the pious this was intensified by their conviction that the Mutiny was in reality a challenge to Christianity itself, which had been allowed as a divine punishment for official compromise with false religions.⁷⁶

As we have seen, by the 1850s the popular press was undergoing radical transformation in gathering and disseminating the news. But, as Graham Dawson has suggested, reports from India at this time were still 'irregular, uncritical and unreliable', allowing full play for sensationalist exaggeration and prejudice. A typical example from *The Times*, purported to be a letter to Lord Shaftesbury

from Lady Canning, described how English women had had their ears and noses cut off by sepoys and that their children had been:

Tortured in cold blood with the utmost refinement of imagination before the eyes of their parents, who were made to witness the cruelties and who were made to swallow portions of flesh cut from the limbs of their children, and afterwards burnt over a slow fire.⁷⁷

These horrendous accounts of Indian atrocities caused a widespread demand for revenge, as Thomas Macaulay noted: 'The cruelties of the sepoys have inflamed the nation to a degree unprecedented in my memory. Retribution, when it came was greeted with delight by the people who 'three weeks ago were all against capital punishment'.⁷⁸

The campaign to subdue the rebels was more than a military exercise to regain control and punish the tormentors of women and children, because India, as Brian Stanley has argued, possessed 'unique significance' for Victorian Christians. 'Religious minds had seized upon the informal and often unofficial annexations . . . as proof that India had been entrusted to Britain by God to be reclaimed by missionary activity'.⁷⁹ Since the 1830s, India had been the main area for missionary activity and the most challenging. Thus it was common to think of the sub-continent as a battleground in which soldiers of Christ struggled against the forces of darkness. It was an easy transition, then, to see the army's campaign to restore order as an extension of this missionary activity, and the British soldier as the new crusader fighting for the opportunity to renew the struggle for conversion.

These 'warriors of Christ' were feted as heroes, particularly generals such as Lawrence and Campbell, but it was Henry Havelock who was to be elevated to the status of soldier-saint. Virtually unknown before 1857, he became a national hero after his victories at Cawnpore and Alambagh, and then at the relief of Lucknow, where he died a martyr's death. But it was more than military prowess that ensured his elevation to the pantheon of Victorian heroes. As Anderson has noted, his death occurred at a time when Victorian society was rediscovering Puritanism, 'primarily under Carlyle's influence, and Puritans were made to stand, not for specific religious beliefs or practices, but for self-discipline and fearlessness'.⁸⁰ Thus Havelock, through religious devotion, courage and military prowess, could be hailed as a true Puritan soldier. He was also of the middle class, an officer who had achieved his rank not through wealth or patronage, but by hard work and ability, proving that military skill and leadership were not the prerogative of the aristocracy. He was, in fact, a perfect role model for middle-class Victorians.

When the Mutiny broke out, Havelock was Adjutant-General in Bombay.

Promoted Brigadier-General, he was given command of a flying column with orders to put down the insurrection in Allahabad and relieve the besieged garrisons at Cawnpore and Lucknow, and between 12 July and his death on 22 November, he won a series of spectacular victories, often against vastly superior numbers. After his first engagement at Fetchpur, he issued the first of his 'spirit stirring' orders to his troops. Having described what had been achieved, he then explained to what the victory was owed:

To the fire of the British artillery . . . To the power of the Enfield rifle in British hands; to British pluck, that great quality which has survived the vicissitudes of the hour, and gained intensity from the crisis; and to the blessing of Almighty God on a most righteous cause, the cause of justice; humanity, truth, and good government in India.⁸¹

Presumably it was also God's will, as interpreted by Havelock and the other chivalric Christian warriors, that the rebels should be taught a lesson they would never forget. Graham Dawson recounts a number of brutal acts of revenge by the British, summed up by General Bernard's report that, 'We burnt every village and hanged all the villagers who had treated our fugitives badly until every tree was covered with scoundrels hanging from every branch', and the comments of an ordinary soldier who, having witnessed the Mutineers blown apart by cannon, claimed, 'it was a horrible sight but a very satisfactory one . . . The pieces were blown about in all directions.'⁸²

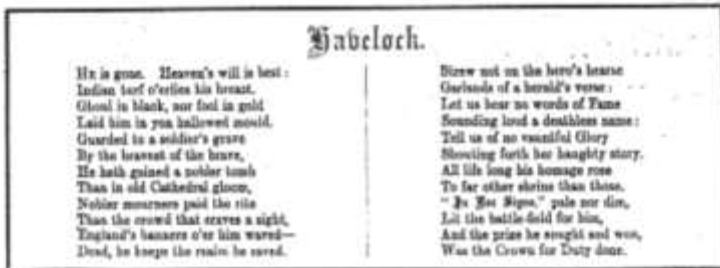
When Havelock reached Lucknow his force was insufficient to lift the siege and joined the beleaguered garrison. It was only the arrival of Colin Campbell's troops some weeks later that relieved the city. When Havelock arrived at Lucknow he was suffering from acute dysentery. His condition worsened, and on 22 November he died. However, it was commonly accepted that 'if [he] did not actually fall under the deathshot of the enemy, he perished from disease aggravated by unsparing exertion', and was thus considered a martyr.⁸³ His military triumphs and heroic death won him enormous public acclaim in England. This was partly due to the manner in which his progress had been reported in the press. Given the problems of gathering news from India, these reports appeared at intervals and read almost as instalments of an adventure serial – Havelock leaves Bombay! – Havelock at Cawnpore! – Havelock marching to Lucknow! Clearly, such reporting intensified the excitement of his exploits and turned them into a dramatic adventure narrative. The report of his death was the final element in the saga and it was widely believed that Havelock, by his willing sacrifice, had saved India for the British!

Havelock's religious convictions, his military skill and his martyr's death

before Lucknow, ensured that the public recognized him as the very epitome of the Christian Soldier. As the *Bombay Times* put it:

Under God, this heroic captain, with his brave Englishers, has served India. His march has been so triumphant, his success so marvellous, as to impress even the public mind with the conviction that he has received his mission from a higher than earthly rule.⁸⁴

At home, streets, terraces and ironically even public houses were named in his honour (Havelock was a total abstainer). A statue was erected in Trafalgar Square and a flood of articles, pamphlets and biographies celebrating his life and achievements were rushed into print during 1858.⁸⁵ The *Illustrated London News* published a wonderfully mawkish verse accompanied by an image of the British lion weeping for his favourite son (illus. 7). In 1860, Havelock's brother-in-law, John Clark Marshman, published what became the definitive biography, *The Memoirs of General Sir Henry Havelock*. The book remained in print until



7 *Illustrated London News* pays tribute to Indian Mutiny hero Sir Henry Havelock, the Christian warrior, 1858.

1909, and a children's version became a favourite text for Sunday school and class prizes. But Havelock was one of many, albeit the most celebrated, and it was widely believed that Christian soldiers in India had been given the victory because it was God's will. It thus confirmed all the nationalistic tendencies of the Evangelicals. As the *Baptist Magazine* put it:

The tide of rebellion [has been] turned back by the wisdom and prowess of Christian men, by our Lawrences, Edwardes, Montgomerys, Freres, and Havelocks . . . God, as it were, especially selecting them for this purpose.⁸⁶

In the last half of the century, Havelock would be joined by other soldier-martyrs, most notably Charles Gordon 'martyred' at Khartoum in 1885 – Christian warriors prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for God and empire and provide perfect role models for an imperial race.⁸⁷

The Havelock myth, however, was only one strand in the cultural representation of the Mutiny, which impacted upon the popular mind even more dramatically than the Crimean War. 'The Mutiny', claimed John MacKenzie:

. . . Secured more public attention than any other imperial event and had far-reaching cultural consequences. No event was more alluded to more frequently in painting, sculpture, public monuments in both India and Britain, journalism, popular biography, memoirs, books of heroes, as well as the Anglo-Indian literature of the late nineteenth century.⁸⁸

The events of 1857 were frequently used as the basis for popular fictions which began to be published even before the end of the year and continued to inspire novelists until the late 1970s.⁸⁹ One of the earliest, by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, was published in the Christmas edition of *Household Words*. 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners' is a thinly disguised Mutiny story and demonstrates a far less humanitarian side of the novelist, clearly revealing that his concern for the wretched of the earth stopped with the white race. As Brantlinger tells us, his correspondence and journal at this time were full of anxiety about the Indian crisis, the fate of the Europeans and his concern that the 'race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested . . . should be exterminated'.⁹⁰

Dickens and Collins were followed into print by a series of novels of which George Lawrence's *Maurice Dering* (1864) was perhaps the best known.⁹¹ But besides prose, the events of the Mutiny and the heroes of the army inspired a number of epic and lesser poems, including Tennyson's 'Havelock' ('Every man in Britain/ Says, "I am of Havelock's blood"'). Curiously, the Mutiny provided inspiration for Tennyson's epic, 'The Defence of Lucknow', over twenty years later.

The bloody events of 1857 also provided material for dramatists anxious to play to the morbid fascination of the public. *Keereda and Nena* [sic] *Sahib* was performed at London's Victoria Theatre in November 1857; and was quickly followed by *India* at the Surrey and *The Fall of Delhi* at the Marylebone. The spectacular *The Storming and Capture of Delhi* was offered at Astley's in Birmingham, and in 1859 Glasgow offered *The Indian Revolt*. Until well into the 1860s, theatres all over the country offered a variety of dramas, pageants, spectacles, panoramas and dioramas reconstructing the violent history of the revolt. These included *The Storming of Delhi* (pyrodrama at Belle Vue, 1858), *Sites and Scenes of the Indian Revolt* (diorama, London, 1858), and the most successful of the Mutiny dramas, Dion Boucicault's *Jessie Brown or, The Relief of Lucknow*, which opened in London in 1862 after a highly successful run in New York.⁹²

Through technical developments in printing, visual representations of the soldier in action were accessible to a far greater public than ever before. As we have seen, war correspondents and special artists, even photographers, were sent to the Crimea, but India was too far away for newspapers to send their agents, and engravers at home were forced to create imaginative illustrations with scant regard for reality. Hichberger has noted that there was only one European artist in India at the time of the Mutiny – Egron Lundgren, a Swede. However, the printer Agnew was quick to make contact and eventually bought many of his sketches as the basis for T. J. Barker's epic, 'The Relief of Lucknow' – a canvas showing the meeting of Havelock, Outram and Campbell.⁹³ Later important paintings of the events were Edward Armitage's 'Retribution' (1858) and George Jones' 'Lucknow', exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1865. There was little demand for large-scale oil paintings other than as the basis for engravings, but the real market for visual material was in the illustrated weeklies, cheap prints and in the illustrations accompanying the many histories and memoirs of the campaign.⁹⁴ One of the most common themes for illustrators was of barbaric mutineers slaughtering the innocent; a powerful justification for the British presence in India and for the savage reprisals taken against the rebels (illus. 8).

The Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny did much to legitimize war. Both events were portrayed as righteous acts and appeared to justify evangelical convictions that Britons were indeed the chosen people. British aggression was hypocritically portrayed as a chivalric defence of the weak or a religious crusade against the forces of darkness, while conquest brought order to chaos and took the benefits of civilization to the unenlightened. These events also enhanced the reputation of the British soldier, which, as we have seen, had been undergoing transformation since the French Wars. By the 1860s, in the popular imagination, the soldier had become an honest and heroic figure, and the army an instrument

8 The Indian Mutiny: the massacre of the British at Jhansi, 1857.



of the 'peoples' will'. This perception of war and the soldier created a growing acceptance that the security of the empire and the achievement of national goals depended upon force of arms. By the 1860s, admiration for the soldier, the prevalence of military sentiments and ideals and the willing acceptance of force, had taken root in the cultural life of the nation and marked the final acceptance of the military rationale for the Empire. As Michael Howard has explained:

. . . [T]he Mutiny transformed what had been basically a trading empire into an explicitly military one, with an army of occupation whose primary duties were to assist the civil power in maintaining British rule. Simultaneously the advance of Russian power towards the Oxus gave Britain what she had not had . . . since the Act of Union . . . a land frontier with another and potentially hostile state. The British Army for the first time had a permanent 'raison d'être', comparable to those of its great continental rivals . . .⁹⁵

The acceptance of war and military force had dramatic consequences for the British people, not least for the perception of masculinity. Graham Dawson has suggested that, by the 1860s, the soldier had become the 'quintessential figure of masculinity', an idealized figure who represented all that was best in the English character, the epitome of national identity, a chivalric and Christian warrior. Even that most unmilitary of gentlemen, John Ruskin, could tell his officer audience in 1866 that ' . . . the great veteran soldiers of England are now men every way so thoughtful, so noble, and so good, that no other teaching than their knightly example, and their few words of grave and tried counsel, should be either necessary for you, or even . . . endured by you'.⁹⁶

It has been suggested that, for the early Victorians, the image of manliness

represented a concern with the 'successful transition from Christian immaturity to maturity, demonstrated by an earnestness, selflessness and integrity' [and] only later did it come to stand for a neo-Spartan virility'.⁹⁷ But as we have seen, behind the more sensitive imaginings of the early Victorians lay a fundamental admiration for the man of action, the warrior-hero. In 1859, as war and preparation for war became even more widely accepted as essential to national well-being, heroic male fantasies could be acted out as thousands of men volunteered to be part-time soldiers in the Rifle Volunteers. The opportunity to wear uniform and share in the martial image without any of the hardship or danger faced by the regular soldier proved enormously popular, and men flocked to join (illus. 9). The Volunteers were initially created through fear of a French invasion. That crisis soon passed, but the Volunteers themselves, who never mustered less than 200,000 men annually, remained active until 1908, when they were absorbed into the Territorial Force.⁹⁸ It seems clear, then, that while few men were willing to serve in the regular army, the idealized image of the soldier was a powerful icon of masculinity which could be indulged through this dimension of the pleasure culture of war.

Ideas about war and masculinity were disseminated through a variety of popular cultural forms which suggested that war was normal, romantic and exciting. As we have seen, the pleasure culture of war, the reconstruction of conflict as entertainment, served a number of important functions within British society. It distanced the public from the realities of war and made conflict acceptable; it helped to resolve moral uncertainties about the use of violence, and may well have contributed to stability and peace at home by



9 A Volunteer Festival at Grimston Park, 1864. Men flocked to join the Volunteer Rifles.

encouraging Britons to direct their hostility, not at their fellow countrymen, but at the Other. Harold Perkin has suggested that:

Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world, and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical.⁹⁹

Much of this change was due to the acceptance of the evangelical creed and increasing educational provision; but it seems that much of the inherent aggression, brutality and bloodthirstiness of the English was never really eliminated; it was simply redirected into acceptable channels through the pleasure culture of war, and focused outwards at European rivals or the subject races of Asia or Africa. Thus, while the Other was subjected to that aggression and brutality, society at home became more orderly and peaceful. In 1860, the government issued arms to substantial numbers of the working class in the Rifle Volunteers, safe in the knowledge that those weapons would be directed at the French or other invaders, and not at fellow Britons or the ruling elites.

During the second half of the century, the legitimization of conflict was powerfully reinforced by the emergence of a seemingly 'scientific' justification for war. In 1859, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, and while few actually read the book, most literate Britons thought they had grasped its meaning. However, it was not long before evolutionary theory was being applied to human societies, and under the heading 'Social Darwinism', it was crudely argued that nations, like animals, were also involved in the struggle for survival. As Bernard Semmell has pointed out, it was widely believed that human progress was the 'result of an evolutionary struggle between groups of men, between tribes or nations or races, the fittest group predominating in the ceaseless warfare which constituted the evolutionary process'.¹⁰⁰

By the end of the century, Britain's leading exponent of Social Darwinism, Karl Pearson, could suggest that national progress depended on racial fitness to win the battle for survival, and the supreme test of that fitness was war: 'the fiery crucible out of which comes the finest metal'. For Pearson, war was the ultimate challenge for the nation, and he went on to claim: 'when wars cease, mankind will no longer progress for there will be nothing to check the fertility of inferior stock'.¹⁰¹ War, then, served another vital function for the nation. In Cecil Eby's felicitous phrase, 'it functioned rather like well-managed pruning shears, eliminating the weak and undesirable shoots and allowing the development of luxurious blossoms'.¹⁰² War ensured that only the strong would survive and procreate, and in a climate where fear of racial deterioration was

widespread, war not only culled the weak and inferior but stiffened the sinews of society. As Michael Adams has noted, it was widely believed that a 'little bloodletting . . . [was] good for the body politic as well as for the individual'.¹⁰³

As success in war was essential for national well-being, it was sometimes suggested that a military-style model was the most effective means of organizing the nation to take part in the enduring human struggle. Military success was due to discipline, order, an accepted hierarchy and efficiency and, despite occasional setbacks, the British Army was remarkably successful in numerous imperial wars. By the end of the century, many, like Robert Owen and Samuel Smiles



10 A true officer enjoys his tot: advertising using the excitement of war to sell products, 1899.

before them, came to believe that the military paradigm offered the best route to individual improvement and national efficiency.¹⁰⁴ A military-style structure was adopted by religious bodies like the Salvation Army (who fought an endless 'war' against moral decay) and by youth organizations, while workers were sometimes encouraged by their employers to join the Volunteers in order to be imbued with a sense of discipline, order and self-respect. After 1870 even school-children were subjected to regular drill in the hope of producing an orderly and disciplined population. On the eve of the Great War, the Secretary of the Navy League, H. F. Wyatt, combined religious and biological ideas about war with the notion of a military-style social structure, in a forceful argument that war was actually part of God's plan for the improvement of humankind: 'Preparation for war is the enemy of sloth . . . Preparation for war is the dissolvent of apathy . . . Briefly, victory is the crown of moral quality, and therefore . . . the "survival of the fittest" means survival of the ethically best'.¹⁰⁵ An extreme view, of course, but such ideas, albeit in less dramatic form, permeated society in the last decades of peace. War had become such an accepted commonplace activity for the British that its images could even be used in the marketing of such domestic items as embrocation, Scotch whisky and tobacco (illus. 10, 11).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the public was fascinated by war; by the romance and glamour of battles in exotic locations where plucky British Tommies made short shrift of the Queen's enemies. In dramatic prose and heroic



11 War added glamour to cigarette advertising, 1902.

illustrations, newspapers pandered to this interest and war correspondents were, as Kipling cynically noted, 'sent out when a war begins, to minister to the blind, brutal, British public's bestial thirst for blood. They have no arenas now, but they must have special correspondents'.¹⁰⁶ Correspondents such as Bennett Burleigh and Archibald Forbes, and artists like Melton Prior and Richard Caton Woodville, reinforced the idea of imperial warfare as chivalric adventure and that Britons had inherent war-like abilities. While sometimes critical of military leadership, they largely identified with the army, played down the unpleasant realities of battle and created negative stereotypes of the 'enemy'. Never for a moment did they question Britain's right to empire. And while military leaders like Wolseley, Roberts and Baden-Powell may well have regarded the presence of correspondents on the battlefield as a 'damned nuisance', they were only too well aware that favourable reports were essential in building their reputation at home.¹⁰⁷ The popular press, then, helped to spread the gospel of righteous war in the cause of empire, and helped perpetuate the myth of the soldier-hero.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, popular militarism had become a major strand in the cultural fabric of the nation. But, as Anne Summers has pointed out, British militarism was 'utterly different from "Prussianism" . . . more than a ruling class ideology, and far more than an ideological instrument of the professional armed forces'.¹⁰⁸ It was a genuinely popular movement which reflected acceptance of war as a means of achieving national goals, an admiration for and pride in the exploits of the army and its heroes; a belief that military values and attitudes would improve the health of the people, create a more efficient work force and eliminate social ills. Popular militarism appealed as much to Liberals as to Tories, and even to socialists like H. M. Hyndeman and Robert Blatchford; it was embraced by the established Church and Non-Conformists alike, and became a major theme in a rapidly developing popular culture which would guarantee that successive generations of young Britons, the guardians of the future, would be indoctrinated with such ideas and thus ensure the survival of the British Empire.

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