

Modern Age, the position of England has been mysterious and complicated, and as England has become Britain this is true also of Britain and the British Empire—there is no doubt that this mystery is the secret of our strength, but, as the probing of a mystery only leads to the discovery of deeper truths, we do not hesitate to attempt the task.

With the break-up of mediaeval Christendom, England, like some other European countries, became intensely national in feeling, in ambitions, in religion. At the same time, and indeed as a part of the same process, the English imagination turned to the New World, which provided a boundless field for the enrichment and expansion of national life and for the propagation of national ideals. An empire of the New World was now the dream of Englishmen. Let us consider first what this dream of empire meant ; secondly, how Englishmen prepared themselves to win it ; thirdly, how, in the race for empire, England was favoured above other nations.

(1) The empire of the New World was, to begin with, a religious ideal ; the quest for it was a crusade. The English supposed themselves to be the chosen people, enjoying a monopoly of divine truth. A strange belief, it may seem, for rough sea-faring folk such as were the Elizabethan pioneers of the imperial idea. But we have the very perfect example of John Davis (who discovered Davis' Straits, and died in 1605) in those days, and of Captain Cook in a much later age, to show how religion may be and has been the mainspring of the conduct of great sailors, even though their religion goes along with characteristics that may seem irreconcilable with a religious faith. But it was not only the seaman who believed himself one of a chosen people. That conviction was shared by the merchant who went long