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## WHAT IS THE BRITISH EMPIRE?

BY  
**SIR CHARLES LUCAS,**

What is this Empire? What are its main features? Wherein does this British Empire differ, if it does differ, from other Empires past or present? In Gray's "Elegy in a Country Church-Yard" is the line:

"Hands that the Rod of Empire might have sway'd."  
Empire, as Empires have come down to us in history, ordinarily implies a large territory, consisting of more or less continuous and adjoining provinces, made subject by conquest, ruled by military despotism, administered on more or less uniform lines.

The Rod of Empire is over it all. Such were the Empires of the past, which ran their course, of Persia, of Alexander the Great, of Rome. Such in our day is the Russian Empire. How stands the British Empire when compared with them? It seems to me to stand alone among Empires in four respects in its surpassing size, in being the Empire of an island, in the diversity of the elements of which it is composed, in the fact that it rests upon a democratic basis—that it is not the creation of a government or a ruler, but the result of the growth of a people.

The British Empire includes nearly one quarter of the land surface of the globe. It is about seven times as large as the old Roman Empire in its greatest extent. About one quarter of this enormous area has been acquired within the last forty years. In other words, in the most democratic times the Empire has grown faster than ever before.

It is the Empire of an Island. I know no other instance in the history of any appreciable Empire being acquired by an island; but those who come after will probably find a parallel in Japan. Many results have flowed from the island home, the island genius; I note two. An island is a land with clear-cut, sharply defined boundaries. A growing people in an island are not like a growing people on a continent; they cannot satisfy their growing paths by simply stepping over the line, removing their neighbor's landmark, and annexing an Alsace and Lorraine. What they can do is to go over the seas to where lands are emptiest or penetration into them most easy for the comparatively few new-comers who can be borne in ships. That is what this island people have been doing for three centuries past.

Hence there is nothing continuous about the British Empire. The Dominions, Colonies and Protectorates are scattered in rich profusion in every continent and on all the seas. Canada runs up into the Arctic Ocean. The equator runs through British East Africa. It passes close to the British port of Singapore. It traverses the British Protectorate of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in the Pacific. Far away in the Southern Ocean are the Falkland Islands, roughly in the latitude of the Straits of Magellan.

The second result of the island home is that the islanders' instincts took them in the beginnings of Empires to islands, peninsulas and coast-lines. Like to like: the sea-roving race for long continued, like Asher, on the seashore. Only by slow degrees they expanded into the continental hinterlands. The Spaniards overran a continent in a wave of conquest. The British might be traced round the word from one island on peninsula to another. They made an Empire by stepping-stones.

In such a great space as is contained in the British Empire the lands and people must necessarily be widely different from one another. A showman of the Empire could produce from it samples of almost every conceivable climate, color, product, race, language, religion, law and constitution. Take two of the great provinces of the Empire, Canada and India, and contrast them. Canada a northern country, running up into the Arctic regions, with a correspondingly cold winter climate; India a tropical land in the centre of the earth. Canada, the size of Europe, nearly double the size of India, with a population of about eight millions—much the same population as Belgium had before the war; the whole population white, except for a few North American Indians and Esquimaux, all or nearly all Christians, the very large majority speaking English or French; India, half the size of Canada, its population numbering 315,000,000, nearly forty times the population of Canada, nearly all colored, in religion mainly Hindus, Mohammedans or Buddhists, speaking some 147 distinct languages. Canada a self-governing dominion, with such parliamentary institutions as we have at home; India either under direct British rule or protected native rulers,

knowing nothing as yet of Houses of Commons except by hearsay.

**WHO ARE IN THE TRENCHES?**  
Go to the trenches in Flanders; Canadians, including French-Canadians, and East Indians of various races are fighting in our ranks. Go to the Dardanelles; East Indians again, Australians, New Zealanders, including colored Maoris, are among our soldiers.

The Empire is an Empire of all sorts and conditions of lands and of peoples; its hall-mark is diversity.

Do you want uniformity? You must go to Germany; it is made in Germany.

Do you want diversity? Go to the British Empire; it grows there of itself. The British Empire is like a great jigsaw puzzle, in which new pieces are constantly being inserted. The pieces are of all sizes, shapes and colors; but they fit in somehow, and make an intelligible whole—ONE LARGE MAP OF LIBERTY.

The fourth characteristic, which makes the British Empire unlike any other Empire, is that it is an Empire on a democratic basis. The proof of this is two-fold—first, the diversity of which I have spoken; and secondly, the contentment of its members, which is due to the liberty that democracy implies or ought to imply despotism and uniformity go hand in hand; the latest instance is the case of Germany. Uniformity, as I have said, is made in Germany, and Germany was made by and made into a military despotism. The despot sets himself to remake man, in his own image, and men do not love being remade, as if they were so many used-up golf balls. The present war is in truth a contest between the principle of uniformity for which Germany stands, and the principle of practice of diversity for which the British stand. Uniformity is a most powerful weapon of offence; it means drill, organisation, obedience to one will, carrying out one plan; it produces as we see in Germany, the maximum of efficiency and is consistent with intense patriotism.

**BUT IT DOES NOT MEAN FREEDOM.** Diversity has many and patent weaknesses, but it embodies the life-giving spirit of liberty. The diversity of the British Empire means that different peoples have been allowed to develop each along its own lines—that they have not all been melted down and recast in one mould. This is a great and a novel experiment in Empire, for Empire through the ages has meant imposing the will of one ruler or people on other peoples, and it has usually been imposed in one and the same way. Diversity means that the ruler—whether the man or the people—has adapted him-

self to the ruled, instead of forcing the ruled to adopt his model; that, in the Bible words, he has become all things to all men.  
The result is the contentment of the ruled, as seen at this time of crisis. All parts of the Empire want to help to give service in men or money or kind. Here is an extract from an address from the turbulent Somali tribes of the north-east of Africa: "Humbly we ask, why should not the Somali fight for Britain also. We beg the Government to allow our warriors to show their loyalty. In former days the Somali tribes made war against each other. Even now it is so; it is our custom. Yet with the Government against the Germans, we are as one—ourselves, our warriors, our children. By God it is so." Indian prices give in princely fashion, and, moreover, come themselves to fight. Every colony and protectorate in the Empire sends men or money or their special produce. The words of Psalm lxxii. would apply to what is happening in the British Empire: "The kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents." That Psalm begins, "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment." The refrain of it is the blessing and the contentment which comes from doing justice, and His Majesty King George stands in the world as the embodiment of British fair dealing. If he says the rod of Empire, it is not a rod of iron; rather it is as Aaron's rod, which budded and blossomed with fruitfulness.

**THE EMPIRE OF AN ISLAND.**

This island, then, alone among islands in all the world and in all history, has evolved a unique type of Empire, standing alone in its size, its dispersion, its numberless diversities, its democratic basis.  
How has this curious phenomenon come into being? Topsy, in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," says of herself, "Specs I growed." That is the only account to be given of this British Empire. It is not, as I have said, the creation of some great ruler, nor the creation of a succession of governments carrying out definitely and continuously a policy of adding house to house and field to field, year in and year out. It is the creation of, or rather the incarnation of a people. It is the result of growth.

Professor Seeley used the memorable sentence that Great Britain acquired an Empire in a fit of unconsciousness. He meant—and it is the plain truth—that the British never set out, as the Germans have lately set out, wide awake and long prepared, with the express object of conquering the world. It was not the line of a business-like people. Conquering is magnificent, but as a rule it is not business. They did what they have done without definitely intending to do it—half unconsciously. They did it over and over again, not at the dictation of their Government, but against the wishes of their Government. The Government has more often been reluctant to add provinces to the Empire than anxious to take them. There are many instances of the British Government refusing to take offers made to them by the natives of countries who asked for British rule and protection. They refused such offers from the natives of New Zealand and Fiji, but were forced to intervene eventually. In 1877, the Sultan of Zanzibar offered to the British the whole of the coastline of Central East Africa; the offer was not accepted, and the result of the refusal was that the Germans came in to a large part of East Africa. In 1883 Queenland annexed that part of New Guinea which did not belong to the Dutch. The British Government refused to endorse the act and the Germans again came in. The path of the British Government round the world has been strewn with lost opportunities and rejected addresses. The Empire is largely a case where greatness has been thrust upon us.

**BEAR HUNTERS**

ALL the talk is now war, hosts are gathered from afar; every mother's son you meet chatters, as he walks the street, how the British or the French (under Joffre) seized a trench. Every brave young British man hopes some day to lead the van on a gory battle-ground, baffled foemen strewn around. Still, in spite of war's alarms, some must work upon their farms; wheels of commerce in their groove somehow must be made to move. Winter's coming, don't forget, the streets are getting mighty wet; you must soon begin to choose just what brand of rubber shoes you will for that season buy for your wife, your girl, your boy. Sometimes you will buy a shoe which will wear a week or two, then you find the heels and soles quickly fill with jagged holes. Some may cost \$1.10, which will wear some days, and then, in through heel and in through toe you will find the water go; coughs and colds with speed will follow—your cheeks become both pale and hollow. Here's advice we give you, friend: your rubber troubles you can end—in any part of Newfoundland you can buy the old Bear Brand. On the sole of every pair you'll find stamped the Polar Bear. The Bear means money saved to you, and likewise 'tis a stylish shoe. No more we'll say, my dear old chap, but add the proverb: "Verbum sap."—nov12.11

Many a fellow is a star because he stuck to the dipper and the milky way.  
Henry B. F. Macfarland's idea of keeping war in the Bible is sound enough, if he could only persuade the fighters to do it.

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**WHAT IS THE USE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE?**

If I am asked the question, What is the use of the British Empire? in the sense of what do we get from it, I answer—apart from the fact that Britshers are largely fed and clothed by it, apart from the fact that they are earning money every day by it—if there was no British Empire, Great Britain would not be safe; the working men of Great Britain would not be safe, democracy would be in danger; if there was no British Empire, it would be a different Britain altogether—a smaller Britain, a poorer Britain, a weaker Britain, a Britain living on sufferance even for its daily bread. Present-day Britain and present-day Britshers are the outcome of the Empire, and without the Empire you must seek another type of country and another kind of race.

This system—call it Empire or whatever name you like—the democracy of Great Britain have inherited. The men of the Empire have in their power to make or to mar. They can scrap the Empire, if they will; but in doing so, they will scrap their own democracy.

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