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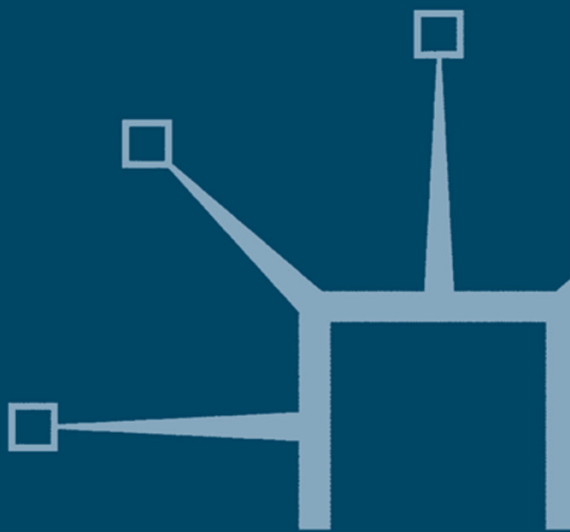
AWARDED FOR VALOUR

A History of the Victoria Cross and the Evolution of British Heroism

Melvin Charles Smith



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Introduction: The Forgotten Hero

Just under two years after the end of the First World War former Colour Sergeant Harry Hampton wrote to the private secretary of King George V, requesting an increase in the pension attached to the Victoria Cross, which at the time stood at £10 sterling per annum. Hampton, who had won his VC during the Boer War, alleged that the winners of gallantry awards from Canada and Australia enjoyed a variety of benefits that the British government failed to provide for its heroes. He closed with the observation that 'honour is all very well, but a little help is worth a lot of sympathy.'[1]

Hampton's dilemma is representative of a larger aspect of the concept of heroism, that of benign neglect. Of all the features of military history, heroism is the most elusive and difficult to quantify. It has thus been largely ignored by military historians; too often they focus on those who fail under pressure and neglect those who rise above it. This work explores one manifestation of the heroic ideal in the Western world, focusing on the evolution of the Victoria Cross from its foundation in 1856 to the current incarnation of the Cross, most recently awarded during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The study follows both the institutional history of the award and its popular history within and beyond the ranks of the armed forces.

Heroism, though wonderful for the headlines of the moment, has remained a phenomenon relatively untouched by modern military history. The hero makes an occasional appearance to add colour to an account of a battle scene. He is mentioned in passing, almost as an afterthought, in summing up the accomplishments of a campaign. Other than that he is startlingly absent, even from works dealing with the subject of military motivation or even courage itself. In *Soldiers: A History of Men in Battle* John Keegan and Richard Holmes noted the benefit of heroic action briefly in the second chapter, but limited their treatment to heroism as a factor in unit morale.[2] Nor did heroism figure in any important sense in Keegan's seminal

work, *The Face of Battle*.[3] Neither Hew Strachan's *European Armies and the Conduct of War* nor Patrick Reagan's *Organizing Societies for War* address the question of the merits of heroism in any fashion.[4]

The works dealing specifically with the concept of courage do scarcely better when it comes to dealing with the hero. Lord Moran's landmark study of courage in combat dealt primarily with the factors that tear down the bravery of an individual rather than the exhibition of that courage in heroic acts.[5] Likewise were a series of lectures delivered at Fort Leavenworth during the First World War exploring the psychology of war.[6] The word 'heroism' was used only three times in the entire series, with far more attention paid to negative factors in troop morale and performance. Heroism has not been entirely ignored, however; Plinio Prioreschi devoted a substantial portion of a chapter in *Man and War* to a precise definition of heroism, and to differentiating between bravery and heroism on the battlefield.[7]

Even in the case of the Victoria Cross most of the specific works on the medal amount to little more than bullets of information, with each winner treated in a vacuum, entirely divorced from any circumstance beyond the rush of battle. The literary treatment of the Cross falls into four broad categories: reference works; works of jingoistic patriotism; studies limited to a specific region, war or service branch; and full-length Cross-winner biographies.

Works in the first of these categories amount to nothing more than encyclopaedias. There might be a few pages of introduction giving a thumb-nail sketch of the origins of the Cross, but little more than anecdotal information.[8] The bulk of each is devoted to individual entries consisting of basic biographical information of the winners – date and place of birth, unit affiliation, place of death – and an account of the deed that won the award. Each is presented as a stand-alone article with a minimum of cross-reference in the case of multiple awards for the same action or family connections between Cross winners. The information presented can be quite useful for the compilation of statistics, but is entirely lacking in analysis.

This first category also has certain elements in common with the second. About the turn of the twentieth century several jingoistic, patriotic treatments of the VC came on the market.[9] This trend continued into the interwar years with the publication of the first volume of *The Victoria Cross, 1856–1920*, still widely accepted as the best early work on the Cross.[10] The thrust of this book and the genre are summed up in its introduction: 'Embracing the finest episodes in British Naval and Military History and the gallant exploits of the Royal Air Force – deeds which will forever live in the memory of man – it should prove a powerful incentive to uphold the honour of

the Flag for generations to come.' Like the pure reference works, these patriotic works are compilations of individual records, strung together in either chronological or alphabetical order. Both of these categories fall far short of the mark of modern scholarship. In practical terms they are little more than anecdotal recollections supported by swathes of purple prose.

The third category of literature dealing with the Cross bears breaking down into three subcategories: regional or national histories of the VC, studies limited to a single war, and studies limited to a single service branch.

Regional studies run the gamut from the efforts of the local historian commissioned by the county council to the professional historian covering all the winners from an entire nation. Many of these works are private publications by hobby historians, and thus have limited usefulness for serious research.[11] Others represent a scholarly contribution to the study of the Victoria Cross, but due to their limited scope they offer only a partial snapshot of the process of the institution, and are primarily concerned with the individuals who won it, rather than what the Cross reveals about the development of the concept of heroism.[12]

The same problem arises with works limited to a specific conflict or service branch. Some of these histories are quite serviceable in their own realm, but by their very subject matter fail to come to grips with the evolution of heroic concepts.[13] Several studies published recently in this area incorporate more than the traditional recounting of the deed in question. John Laffin's *British VCs of World War 2* covers the Crosses won by British (but not Dominion) forces, and offers some analysis of heroism and the patterns of the award in addition to the standard tales of derring-do.[14] Mark Adkin's *The Last Eleven?* examines the Crosses won between the end of the Second World War and 1982, and places them in a larger context than a single battle.[15] An ambitious multi-volume project is currently cataloging the Victoria Crosses of the First World War, by detailing the exploits and giving short biographies of the winners.[16]

Biographies of the Victoria Cross winners are the most numerous type of work on the award, with over 40 published. They too exhibit a wide range of scholarship, from the insightful to the insipid.[17] While biographies sometimes offer wonderful information on the background of VC winners, the nature of the work focuses on the individual rather than the institutional mechanics that drove the VC's evolution.

Only one work approaches being a truly comprehensive, scholarly study of the VC: M. J. Crook's *The Evolution of the Victoria Cross: A Study in Administrative History*.[18] There are, however, some problems with Crook's work. While it is extensively annotated from primary sources, there are passages quoting

memoranda and other correspondence that are not footnoted.[19] In many passages Crook relied on intuition and deduction rather than hard fact to reach his conclusions, and in some cases he reached the wrong conclusions. He also exhibits an almost Victorian sense of propriety in dealing with such ticklish issues as the questionable Cross granted to Lieutenant Henry Masham Havelock by his own father during the Indian Mutiny.[20]

The major drawback of Victoria Cross scholarship is the limited scope of the published body of knowledge. The subject lends itself greatly to 'puff without substance'; the deeds themselves are thrilling and entertaining, and far too often authors have stopped with the recounting of the act without setting it in context. In the instances where authors did go beyond the passion of the moment, moreover, their scope has been limited to a particular service branch, nationality, or era. This work fills the gap in the coverage of the Victoria Cross, analyzing what it has meant in the context of changing concepts of heroism and accomplishment on the battlefield. At first glance the organization of this book may seem unbalanced, with far too much time spent on the Victorian era and the First World War, and only a single chapter dealing with the Second World War and beyond. It also concentrates primarily on the Army. But the fact of the matter is that the basic ideas of what the Cross was were laid down during the nineteenth century and the new paradigm of what the Cross is was established during and immediately after the Great War. In both cases the criteria for what was and what was not VC-calibre heroism were established by Army representatives and test cases in the main, and the vast majority of Crosses have been won by land forces. As of this writing (2007) there have been 1356 VCs awarded. Of these, 521 were awarded before the First World War and 639 were awarded either during the First World War or in conjunction with immediate post-war operations, or in imperial police actions. Only 196 Crosses (14.5 per cent) were granted after the Great War, and no substantive changes have been made in the regulations governing the award since the major revision accomplished in 1920. Thus, to understand the nature of the Cross we must understand the circumstances of its creation and revision. The place to begin is an examination of the British concept of heroism as the Victoria Cross came into being.

One

'I've broken my arm, Dick, but never mind me now': The Hero in Victorian Popular Mythology

> A British tar is a soaring soul,
> As free as a mountain bird,
> His energetic fist should be ready to resist
> A dictatorial word!

These lines from *H.M.S. Pinafore*, first performed in 1878, capture the exuberant essence of Victorian heroism: self-righteous, self-confident, and, thrusting a manly, square jaw forward, it offered a sound thrashing to any who might think otherwise. It was a curious combination of the romantic and the practical, all held in place with a stiff upper lip.

Victorian conceptions of heroism were complex and multi-faceted. Yet they profoundly shaped the values embodied in the Victoria Cross. The sources that might be used to explore this cultural backdrop to the institutionalization of courage that is the Victoria Cross are legion: poetry, literature, art, theater and music hall are just the most obvious. As a consequence a full analysis of popular conceptions of courage in the century preceding the First World War would be a dissertation in itself, and thus the phenomenon can only be registered, rather than fully explored here. This chapter will therefore deal with the subject only briefly, with a view to acquainting the reader with some of the assumptions underlying the genesis of the VC and its evolution. This is not an attempt to place a chronological matrix on the development of a popular heroic ideal, nor is it suggested that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert based their concept of the VC on popular books that had not been written at the time of the inception of the award. It is rather an exploration of the elements, both before and after the creation of the Victoria Cross, that went into the construction of an heroic ideal.

These elements are most clearly stated in the heroic poetry and literature of the Victorian era. These range from the upper crust of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Thomas Babington Macaulay, both publishing at mid-century, through the middle ground of the late Victorian-era Rudyard Kipling and Henry Newbolt, to the vastly popular 'boys' Dumas,' George Alfred Henty, who published a prodigious number of juvenile novels between 1880 and 1902. Between them, their works reached the majority of the literate public and in the process shaped their conceptions of what heroism was.

In examining popular heroism, it is truly a case of the observer having an effect on the observed, a literary version of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As authors wrote of heroic deeds, their concepts of heroism were transferred to the readers, some of whom went on to perform heroic acts, which in turn provided inspiration for tales of derring-do even more daring in the doing. This cycle continued into the First World War, and was probably a factor in the number of underage volunteers in the first months of the war.[1]

Popular fiction underwent a transformation during mid-century; in the 1830s and 1840s most novels had a corporatist tone with main themes that revolved around the conflict between Tractarians and Evangelicals or the duty of the Church, and the characters merely served as spokespersons for a group view of morality. In the 1850s and 1860s individuality came to the fore, with greater emphasis on personal acts and consequences. Juvenile fiction changed as well. The stern, authoritarian morality stories of the past gave way to the 'ripping good yarn,' full of adventure in faraway places, with a stalwart hero taking center stage.[2]

These Victorian heroes did not spring from a vacuum, but rather from a melange of antecedents. The Classical World provided a crop of virtues to glean. The dim mists of Britain's origins furnished heroes both real and mythical. Anglo-Saxon resistance to the Norman Conquest also left a stamp on the Victorian heroic ideal.

Greek epic poetry abounded with examples of the archetypal Hellenic hero. He was self-sufficient yet self-centered; individualistic, yet required the constant recognition of the lesser mortals about him of his greatness; proud, yet petulant. He did not merely expect, but demanded honor for his heroism.[3] To do less would mark him as small minded and weak willed, and to be such was the greatest sin a Greek hero could commit.

It was the duty of the hero to be ever-mindful of his stature, and require those about him to do likewise. He did not necessarily court danger for the sake of proving his manhood, and was quite content to rest on his laurels. A challenge to his honor, however, would spur him into harm's way with reckless abandon.[4] It is worth noting that the key to action for the Greek

hero was his own reputation more than the good of the *polis* or the needs of his comrades.[5] Achilles is a fine model for this archetype. Willing to sacrifice the better part of the Greek forces arrayed against the Trojans, he pouted until Agamemnon was forced to acknowledge the Hero's honor by declaring himself in the wrong and begging for his sword.[6] Likewise, Odysseus had no real need to hear the Sirens' song; it served no purpose other than inflating his ego and enhancing his reputation. This same courting of danger for reputation's sake is evident in Odysseus endangering an otherwise safe escape from the lair of the blinded Cyclops, Polyphemus, by shouting insults toward the shore as the ship pulled away. Despite his comrades' entreaties to silence, he insisted on haranguing the creature and shouting his own name, which gave the Cyclops a point at which to throw.[7]

The flawed heroes of the Greek epics reflected a very real image of the society that produced them, proud and independent city-states whose strongest virtues ultimately proved to be their downfall.[8] There is a certain amount of fatalism in the Greek view of the hero, it seems, recognizing hubris even in its brightest and best and merely acknowledging it as an unchangeable part of human nature. As such, the Greek ideal was acceptable to the Victorians, but with the admonition to pursue the virtues without developing the faults.[9]

The Roman hero was a man of action, action governed by sobriety, probity, and a sense of *gravitas*. His prime virtues were first and foremost an indifference to circumstances and a sense of civic duty in his actions. He was not governed by his passions or accidents of fortune, but rather by moral absolutes and proprieties that remained unaltered in any situation.[10] He was differentiated from his fellow man only by superior talents, not imbued with a congenital superiority of being. His greatness came not from the mere possession of talent, but from harnessing that talent to the service of the state.[11] This ideology dovetailed nicely into the ideology of the expanding Victorian Empire and prompted an identification with the same for poet Henry Newbolt:

> O strength divine of Roman days
> O spirit of the age of faith
> Go with our sons on all their ways
> When we long since are dust and wraith.[12]

Pius Aeneas – 'Dutiful Aeneas,' as his name might be translated – serves as the epic epitome for Cicero's ideal of heroic virtues. He is driven by his duty to his comrades, to his bloodline, and to the ideal of Troy to complete

his task of founding a new city. War is a hateful but necessary thing to Aeneas; despite his prowess at arms, he would rather be honored for the fulfillment of his duty toward his gods, the state, and his family than to be remembered as the slayer of men.[13]

Tacitus's eulogy of his father-in-law Julius Agricola provides an example of the Imperial Roman hero:

> His first military service was in Britain under Suetonius Paulinus, a conscientious and cautious general, when he had been chosen to be the latter's aide; his performance satisfied his commander. Agricola did not behave with the license of young men who turn their military service into dissipation, nor did he, displaying no energy, take advantage of his rank as tribune and his inexperience to pursue his personal pleasure and obtain leaves of absence.[14]

Summed up in these few taciturn lines are the basic virtues of the Roman hero: duty, personal honor, and service to the state. No greater accolade could be ascribed by Tacitus than the phrase 'his performance satisfied his commander.'

On the opposite face of the classical coin were the native heroes of Britain resisting Roman expansion. None became more famous than the warrior queen of the Iceni, Boudicca.

In Boudicca we see a heroine who required several centuries passage to be rehabilitated into the pantheon of British folk-heroes. Some 500 years after her death the monk Gildas referred to her as a 'treacherous lioness [who] slaughtered the governors left to give fuller voice and strength to Roman rule.'[15] Writing in the dawn of the Middle Ages, it is understandable that he might wax nostalgic for the stability of imperial law. No positive mention was made of the warrior queen until she re-emerged as a minor nationalistic heroine during the reign of Elizabeth I, only to fall into ill-favor once again in the seventeenth century.[16] Milton's *History of Britain* dismissed her as the nadir of civilization, a madwoman who compared poorly with the male heroes who had previously resisted the Romans:

> Hitherto what we have heard of Cassibelan, Togadumnus, Venusius, and Carattacus hath bin full of magnanimitie, soberness, and martial skill: but the truth is that in this battel, and whole business, the *Britans* never more plainly manifested themselves to be right *Barbarians*; no rule, no foresight, no forecast, experience or estimation, either of themselves or of their Enemies; such confusion such impotence, as seem'd likest not to a Warr,

> but to the wild hurrey of a distracted Woeman, with as mad a crew at her heeles.[17]

Not until the empire-building reign of her namesake ('Boudicca' can be translated as 'the victorious one,' or 'Victoria') did she become a popular heroine. Her image had been recast by the Victorian Romantics from that of a ruthless and bloodthirsty pagan queen into a personification of patriotism, justice, and propriety.[18] One thousand eight hundred and forty-two years after her brief and bloody career began Britain finally erected a statue to the warrior queen.[19] Although it is doubtful that many made the philosophical connection, the fanciful bronze of Boudicca in her war chariot was raised on the banks of the Thames at Westminster Bridge in 1902, in the wake of the unexpectedly long and embarrassingly costly Second Boer War. Ironically, like the Roman conquest of Britain, this conflict was also a ruthless and bloodthirsty affair, presented to the public as an exercise in patriotism, justice, and propriety.[20]

The Roman-Celtic era also gave rise to the Arthurian cycle of legends. The Victorians rediscovered these tales and they became quite popular with the aristocracy. Despite the military vocation of most of the male principals of these stories, the Victorians were delighted with them, though they focused primarily on the courtly love exhibited at Camelot.[21]

The Norman Conquest created a new crop of Anglo-Saxon heroes who injected a note of tenacity into the Victorian concept of heroism. As the Normans solidified their control of Anglo-Saxon England some savage guerrilla campaigns were waged against the invaders. Just as Celtic heroes had resisted the spread of Roman rule, now the Anglo-Saxons defied the Normans' expansion.

Most of the Anglo-Saxon rebels remained local figures. But one of their number, Hereward the Wake, was rediscovered and adopted by the Victorians as a national hero. He refused to recognize the new masters of England and waged a years-long revolt, striking from the fens and marshes where mounted men could not go. He was ultimately defeated, but injected a note of tenacity into the heroic paradigm. As was the case during the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution, there were a number of radical writers in Victorian England who railed against the 'Norman Yoke' of aristocracy. In Hereward they found a home-grown Noble Savage to prove that the (imagined) natural liberalism of Anglo-Saxon England had been ruthlessly suppressed by the viciously authoritarian Normans.[22]

These different conceptions of martial virtue came together in the Victorian concept of heroism, but were filtered through the lenses of

romanticism and colored by a self-assured sense of national destiny. Elements of these earlier heroic ideals are found in the works of Victorian authors. So what were the tenets preached on the page?

First and foremost, war was seen as an honorable pursuit. This seems odd in a society that on the whole rejected militarism. Yet Tennyson, who himself was attacked in turn of the century reviews as a poet of 'innocuous sentimentality' and 'effeminate grace,'[23] listed among the blessings of a reflective Ulysses that he had 'drunk delight of battle with my peers,'[24] and is of course perhaps most famous for 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,' penned in 1855. Macaulay went even further, deeming a death in just battle the best way to die:

> Then out spake brave Horatius,
> The Captain of the Gate:
> 'To every man upon this Earth
> Death cometh soon or late.
> And how can man die better
> Than facing fearful odds,
> For the ashes of his fathers,
> And the temples of his Gods?'[25]

Lord Macaulay – who himself denigrated hero-worship as an indication of feeble-mindedness – could find nothing wrong with the person of brave Horatius, a man willing to sacrifice all, not for glory, but simply as his duty.[26]

Henry Newbolt epitomized the same sentiment in the famous lines of duty in the face of (implicitly) certain death, '*Vitai Lampada*':

> The sand of the desert is sodden red –
> Red with the wreck of a square that broke; –
> The Gatling's jammed and the colonel dead,
> And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
> The river of death has brimmed his banks,
> And England's far, and Honour a name,
> But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks,
> 'Play up! play up! and play the game!'[27]

Here we find both the dogged determination of Hereward the Wake and the Roman ideals of duty unto death.

Newbolt's contemporary, George Alfred Henty, not only deemed war an honorable pursuit, but one that should be eagerly sought. A declaration of war and the prospect of fighting were meat and drink to Henty's characters;

the knowledge that one might not get in on the action was a cause for remorse:

> 'A vessel has just come in from Plymouth with dispatches. Napoleon has escaped from Elba. He has landed in France, and has been received with enthusiasm. The troops have joined him, and he is already close to Paris, which he is expected to enter without opposition. The King of France has fled.'
>
> For a moment there was silence, then the major leaped to his feet.
>
> 'Three cheers, gentlemen¡and all of those present joined in a hearty cheer.
>
> Then a sudden silence fell upon them. The first idea that had struck each man was that the news meant their again taking the field for another stirring campaign. Then the dismal thought occurred to them that the regiment was already under orders for America . . . .[28]

* * *

> Three days later the expected order arrived . . . . Officers and men were alike delighted that the period of waiting had come to an end, and there was loud cheering in the barrack-yard as soon as the news came. At daybreak the next morning the rest of the baggage started under a guard, and three hours later the Mayo Fusiliers marched through the town with their band playing at their head, and amid the cheers of the populace.[29]

That this aspect of martial virtue was transferred to the real world (or perhaps was a reflection of the real world) is evidenced by the memoirs of Captain Arthur Kerr Slessor, who commanded a company of the Derbyshire Regiment in the Tirah Campaign of 1898:

> The sight of dingy figures clustered round standards on the top of a distant hill, conveyed no certainty of any immediate fighting, until the welcome sound of our guns booming from the Kotal stirred our pulses and quickened our footsteps like a band striking up at the end of a weary march, with the hope that now at last we were going to be engaged with this elusive enemy.[30]

Whether Captain Slessor accurately remembered the passions of the moment or if he was merely conforming to Victorian literary style is immaterial. What is important is that such a statement was expected of a proper Victorian

officer. Likewise was the case of future Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood; denied a Victoria Cross in the Crimea, he resigned from the Royal Navy and took a commission with the 17th Lancers. En route to India in 1858 the regiment's transport made port at Cape Town 'where our spirits fell on hearing that Delhi had fallen, and the confident predictions that the Mutiny would be suppressed before the ship reached Bombay.'[31]

Henty's works in particular came to be closely identified with militarism, so much so that even the stories that did not deal with military scenarios were often published with militaristic cover art. *Facing Death*, published at the turn of the century, is the story of a working-class lad who saved the local coal mine from Luddite-style vandalism, then went on to rescue several trapped miners (and the mine owner) after an explosion in the pit. Although the hero at no point entered the military, nor did the military at any point enter the story, the cover depicts a cavalry trooper at full gallop, wielding a flashing saber.[32] *A Final Reckoning*, set in the Australian Outback, has a rather inexplicable Viking armed with broadaxe and sword on the cover.[33]

Henty had some definite ideas as to the proper conduct of the heroic individual. Once on the field, the hero should forget all except the goal assigned:

> His lips were parched with excitement and the acrid smell of gunpowder. Man after man had fallen beside him, but he was yet untouched. There was no thought of fear or danger now. His whole soul seemed absorbed in the one thought of getting into the battery.[34]

Tennyson gave a very good reason for this sort of behavior. Most quote only the second couplet of this often repeated verse as an example of the purity of the code of chivalry.[35] In so doing, an important motivational concept is missed:

> My good blade carves the casques of men,
> My tough lance thrusteth sure,
> My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure.
> The shattering trumpet shrilleth high,
> The hard brands shiver on the steel,
> The splinter'd spear shafts crack and fly.
> The horse and rider reel:
> They reel, they roll in clanging lists;
> And when the tide of combat stands,
> Perfume and flowers fall in showers,
> That lightly rain from ladies hands.[36]

Martial virtue was the measure of manliness, and thus attractive to women. Although Galahad eschewed such carnal pleasures, the fact that they are noted – and more than once in the poem – indicate that military prowess and sexual reward were linked in the Victorian mind.

Even better than participating in combat was bringing back visible proof in the form of wounds. An honorable wound was not only proof that one had in fact seen the elephant; in light of the state of medical science in the nineteenth century, it marked one as a true survivor. Henty proved quite cavalier in the treatment of even the gravest of injuries, making permanent maiming seem positively desirable:

> 'How is Rawlinson going on?'
>
> 'Oh, I think he will do very well,' the surgeon said. 'Of course he's a little down in the mouth about himself. It's not a pleasant prospect for a man to have to go about on two wooden legs all his life. Still, it's been done in the service; and as the fight was a sharp one, and such an important capture was made, he will get his full pension, and I shall strongly recommend him for Chelsea Hospital if he likes to take it. But he tells me he was by trade a carpenter before he enlisted, and I expect he would rather go down and live among his own people. His wooden legs won't prevent him earning a living at his trade; and as he is rather a good-looking fellow I dare say he won't have much difficulty in getting a wife. Maimed heroes are irresistible to the female mind.'[37]

The preceding passage reveals another aspect of the hero's character: the loss of body parts was simply the cost of doing business. The Kipling stalwarts Mulvaney, Otheris, and Learoyd compared a variety of wounds in 'With the Main Guard.'[38] In Henty's world even the gravest wounds were treated as of little consequence:

> A few minutes later two surgeons entered the room and examined Ralph's arm. They agreed at once that it was necessary to amputate it three inches higher up . . . .
>
> The operation was performed at once, and although he had to press his lips hard together to prevent himself from crying out, he did find it less painful than he had expected.
>
> * * *
>
> 'I saw the surgeon downstairs and he told me – ' and her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears.

> 'That I had lost my left arm, mother. Well, that is nothing to fret about when thousands have been killed. One can do very well without a left arm; and I think, on the whole, that I have been wonderfully lucky.'[39]

What is more, injury should never interfere with completing the task at hand. In *Jack Archer* the hero and a companion, having lowered themselves down a cliff in the face of a storm to save shipwrecked comrades below, faced a minor annoyance:

> 'I've broken my arm, Dick,' Jack said; 'but never mind me now. How many are there alive?'

The hero and his companion went on to rescue 16 doomed souls before themselves returning to safety:

> The Midshipmen were the last to leave the ship. Dick had in vain begged his companion to go up with one of the preceding batches, as the last pair would necessarily be deprived of the assistance from the lower rope, which had so materially aided the rest. Jack, however, refused to hear of it.[40]

Henty required his characters to be true to form to the very end:

> 'Fortescue, are you hit?'
>
> 'I am done for!' the young officer replied faintly; 'one of their bullets has gone through my body; but never mind me now.' As he spoke he tottered, and would have fallen had not the others supported him and gently laid him down on a heap of skins which served as an Afghan bed.[41]

It was important to the Victorian writers to die well, and self-sacrifice was the epitome of heroism. Henry Newbolt recounted heroism displayed during the American Civil War and compared it favorably with British heroes of the past:

> Into the narrowing channel, between the shore
> And the sunk torpedoes lying in treacherous rank;
> She turned but a yard too short; a muffled roar,
> A mountainous wave, and she rolled, righted, and sank.
>
> Over the manhole, up in the ironclad tower,
> Pilot and Captain met as they turned to fly;

The hundredth part of a moment seemed an hour,
For one could pass to be saved, and one must die.

They stood like men in a dream: Craven spoke,
Spoke as he lived and fought, with a Captain's pride,
'After you, Pilot:' the pilot woke,
Down the ladder he went, and Craven died.

All men praise the deed and the manner, but we –
We set it apart from the pride that stoops to the proud,
That strength that is supple to serve the strong and the free,
The grace of the empty hands and the promises loud:
Sidney thirsting a humbler need to slake,
Nelson waiting his turn for the surgeon's hand,
Lucas crushed with chains for a comrade's sake
Outram coveting right before command,

These were paladins, these were Craven's peers,
These with him shall be crowned in story and song,
Crowned with the glitter of steel and the glimmer of tears,
Princes of courtesy, merciful, proud and strong.[42]

For these authors principle was more important than life itself. Henty echoed the same sentiment in *Beric the Briton*: ' "Tell Seutonius that we scorn his mercy," Beric said, "and we will die as we have lived, free men." '[43]

This attitude toward 'dying well' reached the highest levels of society. During the Crimean War, following the Battle of the Alma, Queen Victoria wrote to her daughter, the Princess Augusta: 'You will understand it when I assure you that I regret exceedingly not to be a man and to be able to fight in the war. My heart bleeds for the many fallen, but I consider that there is no finer death for a man than on the battlefield!'[44]

The heroic officer of literature always led from the front, where the fighting – and the glory – was thickest. Rudyard Kipling's Captain Crook O'Neil is an example of the officer who both shares the dangers and privations of his men on campaign, and inspires them with coolness and a clever phrase in even the most dire of situations:

'Knee to knee!' sings out Crook, wid a laugh whin the rush av our comin' into the gut shtopped, an' he was huggin' a hairy great Paythan, neither bein' able to do anything to the other, though both was wishful.

'Breast to breast!' he sez, as the Tyrone was pushin' us forward closer and closer.

> 'An' hand over back!' sez a Sargint that was behin'. I saw a sword lick out past Crook's ear, an' the Paythan was tuk in the apple av his throat like a pig at Dromeen fair.
>
> 'Thank ye, Brother Inner Guard,' sez Crook, cool as a cucumber widout salt. 'I wanted that room.' An' he wint forward by the thickness av a man's body, havin' turned the Paythan undher him. The man bit the heel off Crook's boot in his death-bite.[45]

Elsewhere in *Soldiers Three* and in 'The Ballad of Boh Da Thone,'[46] Crook O'Neil repeatedly won the undying loyalty of his men for his heroic leadership.

Henty attributed the same value to all cool and collected officers, though not in quite such a thick vernacular:

> On the right, however, the Brunswickers were suffering heavily from the cannonade of the French, and were only prevented from breaking by the coolness of their chief. The Duke of Brunswick rode backward and forward in front of them, smoking his pipe and chatting cheerfully with his officers, seemingly unconscious of the storm of fire; and even the most nervous of his young troops felt ashamed to show any signs of faltering when their commander and chief set them such an example.[47]

Macaulay as well pointed out coolness and disregard for danger as one of the prime virtues of Lord Clive. Upon receiving a draft of rough men fresh from England in service with the British East India Company: 'Clive gradually accustomed them to danger, and, by exposing himself constantly in the most perilous of situations, shamed them into courage. He at length succeeded in forming a respectable force out of his unpromising materials.'[48]

The other ranks, on the other hand, were repeatedly enjoined to maintain discipline, follow orders, and do their duty, even under the most extreme of conditions. Kipling's advice was to maintain a stoic attitude:

> When first under fire and you're wishful to duck
> Don't look nor take heed at the man that is struck.
> Be thankful you're livin', and trust in your luck
> And march to your front like a soldier . . .
>
> If your officer's dead and the sergeants look white,
> Remember it's ruin to run from a fight;
> So take open order, lie down, and sit tight,
> and wait for supports like a soldier . . .

And in defeat, to remain defiant and deny the enemy his (or her) pleasure:

> When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,
> And the women come out to carve up your remains,
> Just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
> An' go to your God like a soldier.[49]

To do otherwise was to invite disaster and disdain; the survivors of the company that broke and ran in Kipling's 'That Day' lost the respect of their comrades and confidence of their officers, deemed fit only to tend the camels for the remainder of the campaign:

> There was thirty dead and wounded on the ground we
> couldn't keep –
> No, there wasn't more than twenty when the front begun
> to go –
> But, Christ! along the line o' flight they cut us up like sheep,
> An' that was all we gained by doin' so.[50]

Henty agreed that discipline was the key to success:

> They were but halfway across the plain when a regiment of French cavalry were seen riding in pursuit. The regiments were at once formed into squares within fifty yards of each other, and Terence and Bull in the centre of one square, and Herrara and Macwitty in the other, exhorted the men to stand steady, assuring them there was nothing whatsoever to be feared from the cavalry if they did so. The French rode up towards the squares, but were met by heavy volleys, and after riding round them drew off, having suffered considerable loss, being greatly surprised at finding that instead of a mob of armed men, such as they had met at Avia, they were encountered by soldiers possessing the steadiness of trained troops.[51]

To Victorian authors the courage and heroism of the British soldier was intrinsic, and needed only sensible leadership to guide the natural impulses of the trooper, as Kipling's Private Mulvaney observed:

> Wid Bobs an' a few three-year-olds, I'd swape any army av the earth into a towel an' throw it away afterward. Faith, I'm not jokin'! 'Tis the bhoys – the raw bhoys – that don't know fwhat a bullet manes, an' wudn't care av they did – that dhu the work.[52]

Henty's view differed with that of Mulvaney, as he deemed a certain amount of seasoning necessary to produce an effective soldier:

> Just as brave, my lad, and when it comes to fighting the young soldier is very often every bit as good as the old one; but they can't stand the fatigue and hardship like old soldiers. A boy will start out on as long a walk as a man can take but he can't keep it up day after day. When it comes to long marches, to sleeping on the ground in the wet, bad food, and fever from the marshes, the young soldier breaks down, the hospital gets full of boys, and they die off like flies, while the older men pull through.[53]

For Henty, the natural bravery of youth required tempering; both Henty and Kipling, however, acknowledged the intrinsic heroism of British youth.

'Bobs' – Field Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar – was to Rudyard Kipling the living embodiment of the ideal. At the death of Lord Roberts, Kipling summed up his character as the archetype of Victorian heroism:

> Clean, simple, valiant, well-beloved,
> Flawless in faith and fame,
> Whom neither ease nor honours moved
> An hair's-breadth from his aim.[54]

Kipling's eulogy of the virtues of Lord Roberts compares nicely to that of Tacitus on Agricola.

Although Lord Roberts did operate within the system of patronage and connection that was the Victorian officer corps, Kipling cast him as a soldier to whom the accolades of heroism came justly and without self-promotion. By contrast, the poet denigrated what he saw as the political machinations of Sir Garnet Wolseley, thinking it unseemly that a soldier should seek to curry favor from civilians, that it was wrong for a military man to act in hope of reward. He articulated this position in 'The Taking of Lungtungpen,' where Mulvaney dismissed Sir Garnet as nothing more than a seeker of favor at Court, and in 'Bobs,' in which the true hero's virtues include the fact that he 'does – not – advertise.'[55] As with the sentiments expressed above by Captain Slessor and Evelyn Wood, the important point here is the concept projected, regardless of the actual actions of the individuals of whom the poet writes.

The theme of the modest hero was a constant in Henty's books, with the inevitable consequence that others would recognize the greatness of the great man:

> 'Well, Bob, so I hear you have been fighting and commanding ships and doing all sorts of things. I saw Captain Lockett in the town, and faith if you had been a dozen admirals rolled into one he couldn't have spoken more highly of you. It seems, Mrs. O'Halloran, that Bob has been the special angel who has looked after poor Jack on board the *Antelope*.'
>
> 'What ridiculous nonsense, doctor!' Bob exclaimed hotly.
>
> 'Not at all, Bob; it is too modest you are entirely.'[56]

It was important to Henty that the hero be mindful of his station until proven:

> You will do, my lad. I can see you have got the roughness rubbed off you already, and will get along capitally with the regiment. I can't say that much for young Stapleton. He seems to be completely puffed up with the sense of his own importance, and to be an unlicked sort of cub altogether.[57]

The hero of *In Greek Waters*, Horace Beveridge, willingly placed himself under the discipline of the *Misericordia's* master, despite the fact that he was the owner's son, showing the proper humility of one yet unproven.

In Greek Waters served as a testament throughout to the natural justice of Albion. Set in the savage War of Greek Independence, it allowed Henty to assert the moral superiority of British heroism, and gave an opportunity to explain why the Philhellenes had been so disappointed by the barbarity of the Greeks they had come to free:

> 'Brutes!' Martyn exclaimed with great emphasis. 'How these fellows can be descendants of the old Greeks beats me altogether.'
>
> 'The old Greeks were pretty cruel,' Horace, who had just joined them, said. 'They used to slaughter their captives wholesale, and mercy wasn't among their virtues. Besides, my father says that except in Morea very few indeed are descendants of the Greeks; the rest are Bulgarian or Albanian, neither of whom the Greeks of old would have recognized as kinsmen.'[58]

How easily that explained it! The heroism of the ancient Greeks was not tarnished, because these chaps were actually barbarians in Greeks' clothing.

While in the eyes of the Victorians no native warrior could match the heroism and virtue of Newbolt's 'Island Race,' close association with a

proper officer could impart the virtues of valour and fidelity, at least among the martial races:[59]

> Sons of the Island Race, wherever ye dwell,
> Who speak of your fathers' battle with lips that burn,
> The deed of an alien legion hear me tell,
> And think not shame for the hearts ye tamed to learn,
> When succor shall fail and the tide for a season turn
> To fight with a joyful courage, a passionate pride,
> To die at last as the Guides at Cabul died.

The Guides besieged, their officers slain, resisted the offer to save their lives by surrender. This was the effect of taming the native heart:

> Then the joy that spurs the warriors' heart
> To the last thundering gallop and sheer leap
> Came on the men of the Guides: they flung apart
> The doors not all their valour could no longer keep
> They dressed their slender line; they breathed deep,
> And with never a foot lagging or head bent,
> To the clash and clamour and dust of death they went.[60]

The perfidy of the East allowed Henty to make other points as to the proper conduct of a hero. As Gilbert and Sullivan pointed out in the lyric cited at the beginning of this chapter, a true man does not stand by and allow brutish behavior to go unchecked. The officers of the *Misericordia* dined with a regular British officer ashore, who related the following events:

> One old Albanian who told me he had done this [massacred an entire Muslim village], told me, sir, as if it were a thing to be proud of. I had the satisfaction of taking him by the scruff of the neck and the tail of his white petticoat and chucking him off the pier into the sea. When he scrambled out I offered him the satisfaction of a gentleman, seeing he was a chief who thought no small beer of himself. There was a good deal of difficulty in explaining to him how the thing was managed in a civilized country, and I never felt more satisfaction in my life than I did next morning when I put a bullet into the scoundrel's body.[61]

Such attitudes were not the province of gentlemen alone; shortly thereafter the owner of the *Misericordia* decided that rather than continuing as a Greek

privateer, under which conditions he had engaged the crew, the ship would become a rescue vessel for any imperilled civilian, Greek or Turk. The men did not grumble at the prospect of losing the prize money they had expected from the voyage; instead:

> Three hearty cheers rang out from the sailors. They had all been ashore at Zante, and had heard enough from the soldiers they fraternized with there to fill them with disgust and indignation at the conduct of the Greeks, and this announcement that they would henceforth put a stop to such cruelty, even if they had to fight for it, filled them with satisfaction.[62]

The 'just cause' rang as a clarion call through all these works. For Tennyson, it was the one justification for a life otherwise wasted by foolishness and indecision:

> Let it flame or fade, and the war roll down like a wind,
> We have proved we have hearts in a cause, we are noble still,
> And myself have wakened, as it seems, to the better mind;
> It is better to fight for the good, than to rail at the ill;
> I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,
> I embrace the purpose of God and the doom assingn'd.[63]

Newbolt equated the extension of empire as the will of God, and invoked the blessings of Providence on the just cause:

> Remember, Lord, the years of faith,
> The spirits humbly brave,
> The strength that died defying death,
> The love that loved the slave:
>
> The race that strove to rule Thine earth
> With equal laws unbought:
> Who bore for Truth the pangs of birth,
> And brake the bonds of Thought.
>
> Thou wilt not turn Thy face away
> From those who work Thy will,
> But send Thy strength on hearts that pray
> For strength to serve Thee still.[64]

For Kipling, it was an intrinsic part of the White Man's Burden to take up the heroic racial cause: