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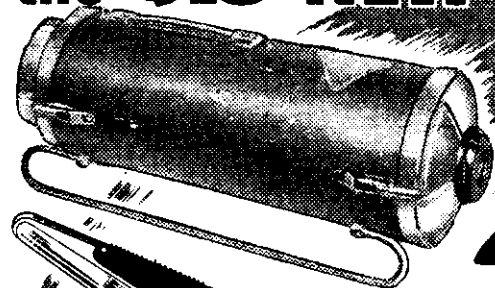
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THE IDEA OF EMPIRE

*New Zealand Scholar Broadcasts
on Third Programme*

WHAT was the Victorian idea of empire? Probably few people would find much difficulty in giving an answer. It was, they would say, the idea of "painting the map red"; of "trade following the flag," of "the white man's burden" of an "empire upon which the sun never sets." This is, indeed, a part of the answer which cannot be ignored. But it is not the whole answer, nor even the most important part. The ideas of the late-Victorian imperialists — of Seeley and Froude, Disraeli and Joseph Chamberlain, Rudyard Kipling and Cecil Rhodes — are a spectacular deviation from the settled tradition of British thinking upon empire. They are not an integral part of it.

To find the ideas which guided our policy and our action over most of the 19th Century (and which largely guide it today) we must go back to the first half of Queen Victoria's reign, to a time before that typically Victorian figure, the "gentle reader," had begun to murmur,

Take up the White Man's
Burden—
Send forth the best ye
breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives
need

In those earlier years we shall find an idea of empire more modest and less condescending, more respectful of genuine human values and less tinged with delusions of grandeur.

Such a mode of thought fits more readily into our ordinary way of political thinking. It stems from the philosophy of which Edmund Burke was the most forceful exponent. It argues that societies evolve organically, upon the basis of their own traditions and necessities, and that to impose alien institutions and controls undermines stability and the restraining force of the moral code. If such ideas are true of England, and of European countries, they are obviously true of colonies as well. But how have they actually formed our idea of empire, and been worked out in our imperial policy? Even now the ordinary Englishman—even the politician or the political philosopher—knows very little about the colonies. Least of all has he that intimate acquaintance with them which is needed for an understanding of their ways of thought—of the subtle changes of outlook which make Australians and New Zealanders something other than "transplanted British"; or of the alien cultures of non-European peoples. In Victorian times ignorance was, certainly, no less.

The answer is, of course, that our imperial thinking has always been done for us by a small minority of men who were specially concerned—men who had lived in the colonies or served at the Colonial Office, missionaries in the field or humanitarians at home, and a few persistent travellers in distant parts of the world. Among the Victorians we have to look to men like James Stephen, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, David Livingstone, Goldwin Smith, Charles Dilke,



★ DR. J. W. DAVIDSON, who gave the accompanying talk last month in the BBC's Third Programme, is a graduate of the University of New Zealand, a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and a lecturer in History at Cambridge University

and Arthur Gordon. They are a diverse group—Stephen, the evangelical who entered the Colonial Office to fight slavery and remained to become its permanent head; Wakefield, the associate in Canada of Lord Durham and leader in the colonisation of South Australia and New Zealand; Livingstone, the missionary turned explorer; Charles Dilke, the republican, who travelled round the world soon after going down from Cambridge and took England by storm on his return with his book *Greater Britain*; Arthur Gordon, the Earl of Aberdeen's youngest son, who abandoned a political career at home for one in colonial administration. Perhaps the most interesting of them all is the penetrating and pungent Goldwin Smith. He gave up the Regius Professorship of Modern History at Oxford, became one of the foundation professors at Cornell, and finally settled in Toronto. He was described by Roundell Palmer (later Lord Selborne), one of his Oxford seniors, as having more of the quality of personality which he supposed Milton to have had than anyone else he had ever met. And Matthew,