



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### **Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### **About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07590577 2



CBA  
CREIGHTON



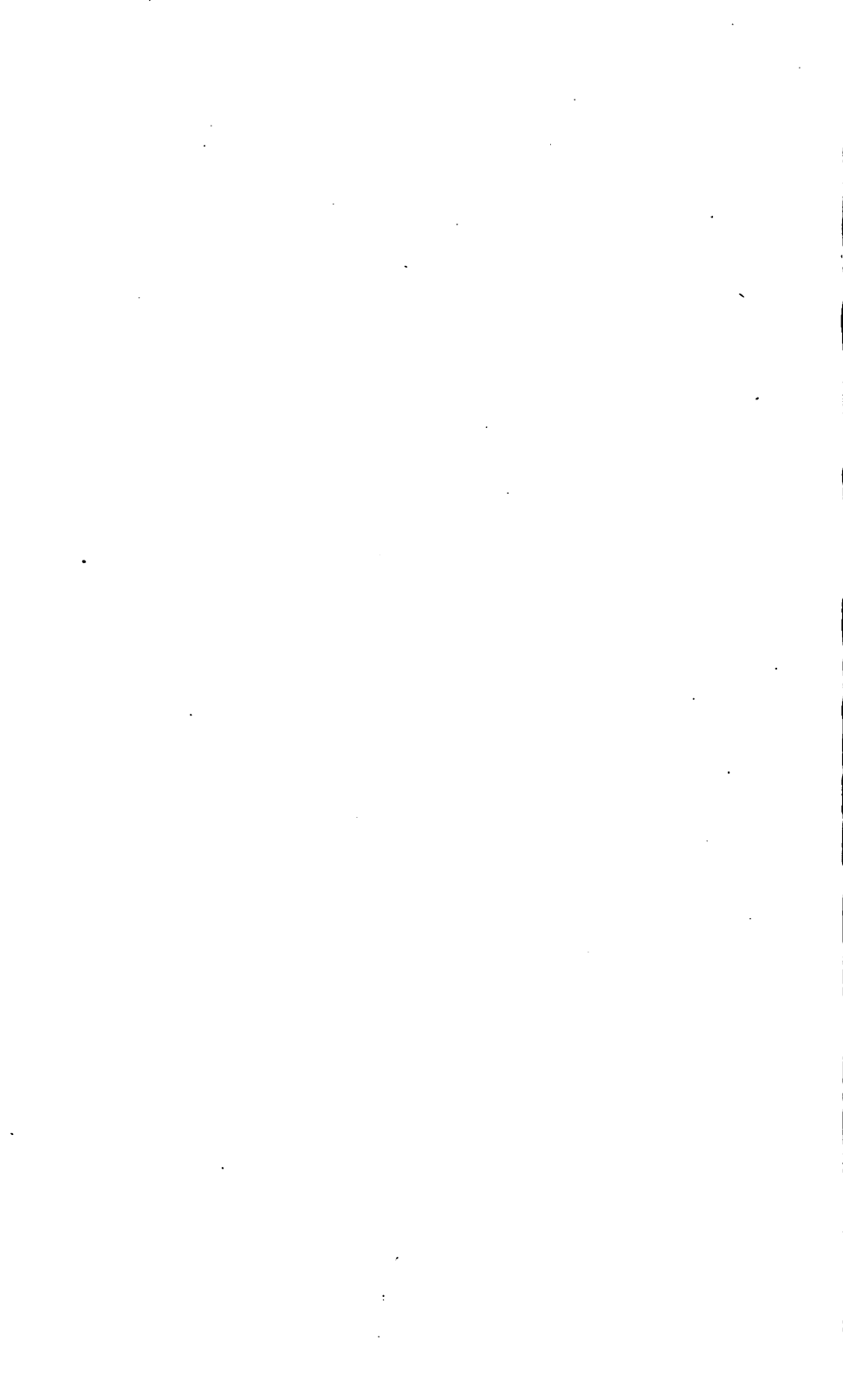


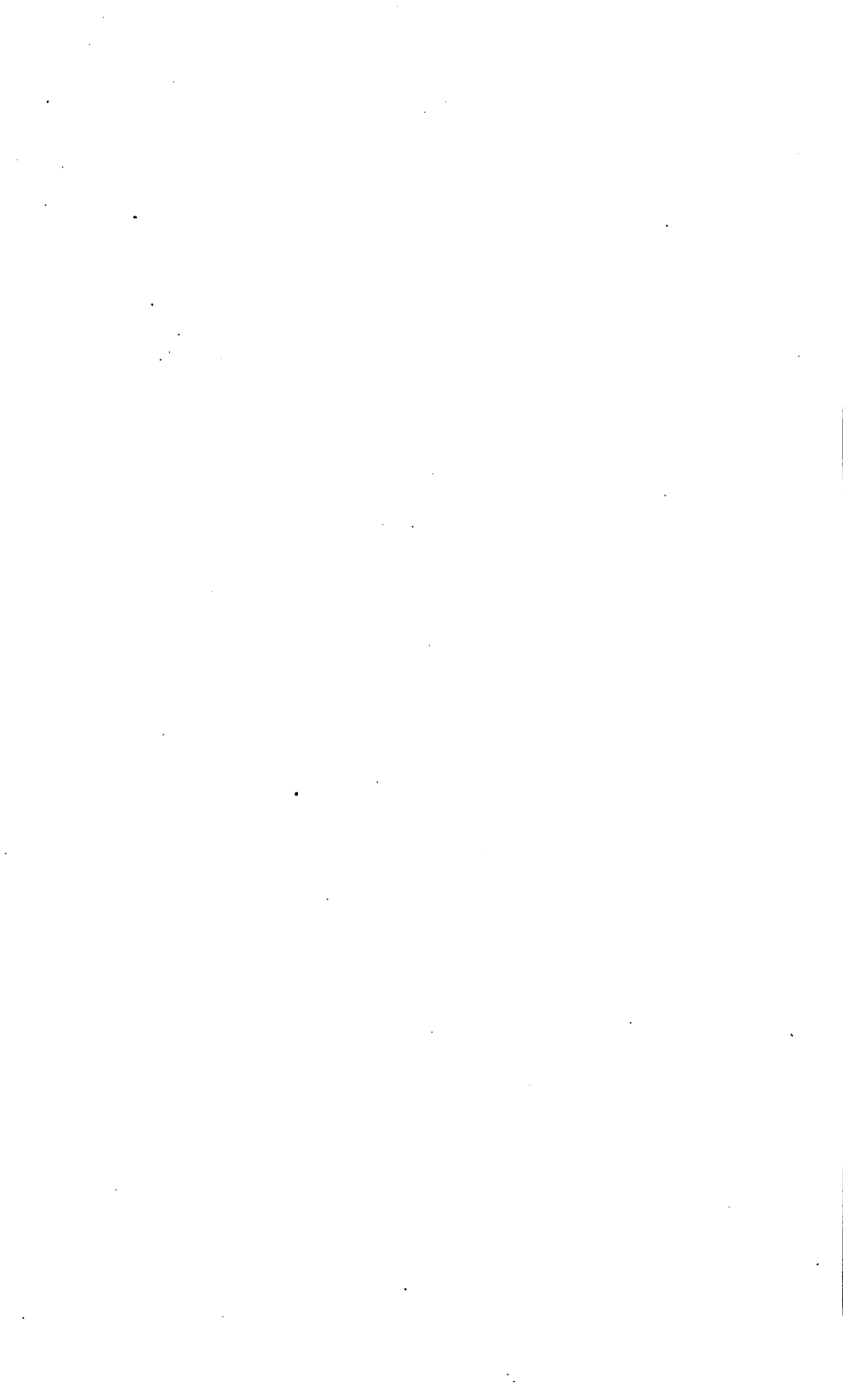


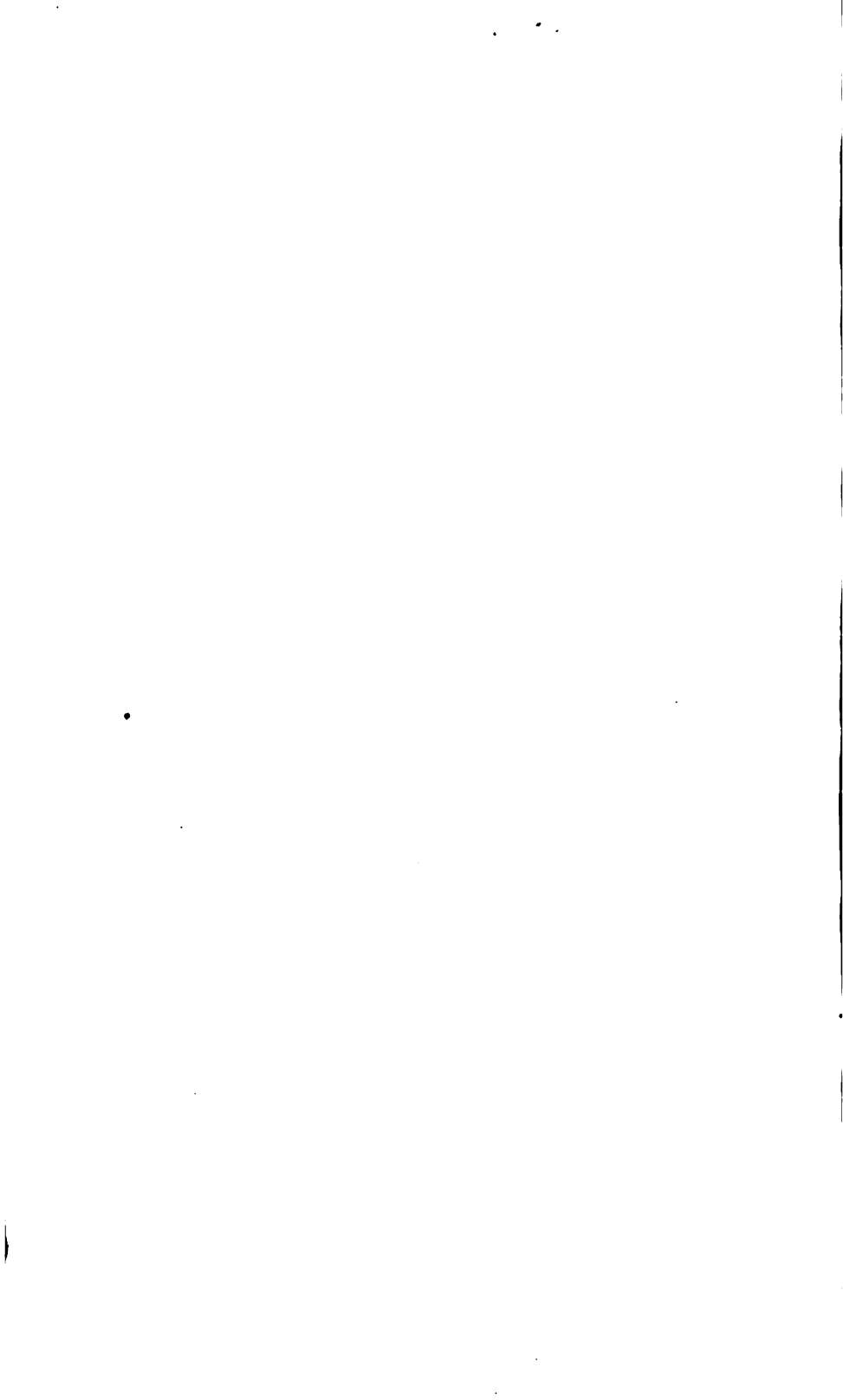
(Creighton)

C.B.B.









THE ROMANES LECTURE, 1896

---

THE  
ENGLISH NATIONAL CHARACTER

*MANDELL CREIGHTON, D.D.*

Oxford

HORACE HART, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

# THE ROMANES LECTURE

1896

---

## *The* *English National Character*

BY THE RIGHT REV.

MANDELL CREIGHTON, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH

HONORARY FELLOW OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD

DELIVERED

*IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE, JUNE 17, 1896*



**London**

HENRY FROWDE, AMEN CORNER, E.C.

OXFORD: CLARENDON PRESS DEPOSITORY, 116 HIGH STREET

1896.  
S.S.O.

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

THE  
ENGLISH NATIONAL CHARACTER.

---

IT may seem that the subject on which I have chosen to address you is alike hazardous and commonplace. There is nothing new to be said about it, and there is always a danger of saying too much. The subject, however, occurred to me at a time when, I suppose, most of us were wondering whether we ought to feel hurt, or flattered, at the sudden interest in our doings which other countries unanimously displayed. We found some difficulty in recognizing the representation of ourselves which our neighbours put before us; and our thoughts turned towards an examination of the contents of our national self-consciousness. Whatever conclusions we reached about the main subject, I think we are in fairness bound to admit that the impression which we produce is some element in what we are. To be misunderstood is, doubtless, a misfortune; but then intelligibility is of the nature of a virtue. The character of an individual is not so much what he thinks himself to be as what others

15

11111  
11111  
11111  
11111



think him. If he lacks the capacity for making clear what he is, that is a defect which must count against him.

Of course the analogy between nations and individuals cannot be pursued very far. Individuals are many; nations are few. Individuals are judged for their own actions; nations have a continuous character, and each generation is paying the penalty for the prejudices created by the actions of its predecessors. Moreover, in judging individuals, we adopt standards which vary according to the scale on which their life was lived; for instance, a statesman is not judged so much by his private life as by his public policy. When this method is extended to a nation, all appreciation of the finer forms of its activity tends to disappear, and only very broad characteristics are taken into account. Further, it must be remembered that at present nations stand towards one another in the relation of commercial firms. In the ordinary course of things they have no occasion to express an opinion about each other's methods of carrying on business; but when competition becomes brisk, and interests conflict, any old stories are useful which will damage their rival's credit. I remember when I was a junior fellow, being at dinner where conversation turned upon University business. In a pause, one who had been silent addressed the only stranger present: 'I think you ought to know that in Oxford we are all so well acquainted with one another's good qualities that we only talk about those points which are capable of amendment.' International criticism is

undoubtedly framed on the same basis, a basis to which no exception can be taken, when it is once understood.

But I have a larger reason than one of temporary interest, which indeed I cannot undertake to satisfy, for attempting to consider this subject. National character is the abiding product of a nation's past; and that conception of the past is most valuable which accounts; not so much for the present environment of a people, as for the animating spirit which produced it, and which must still exist if it is to be maintained. It is not enough that history should account for the growth of institutions, the spread of empire, the march of commerce, or the development of ideas. Other institutions in the past may have been more solid, but they have passed away; other empires may have been vaster, but they have vanished; commerce may have been equally adventurous in other times, but its harbours and marts are in ruins; literature may have spoken in richer tones, and science may have constructed more massive systems, but they are now the inspiration of a few students. All these things came to an end, because national character failed in power to keep what it had acquired; and rapid growth was followed by quick decay. There must be an equilibrium between the powers of getting and keeping; and this must be wrought into the character of the nation itself. The great product of England is not so much its institutions, its empire, its commerce, or its literature, as it is the individual Englishman, who is moulded by all these influences, and is the ultimate test of their value. He exists as a recognizable type of character, with special

aptitudes and capacities, to be appraised ultimately, if you will, by reference to your conception of the goal of the world's progress. Just as a biography would fail if it did not leave you with a clear notion of its hero's character, how it was formed, and how it was applied, so any view of history falls short of its purpose which does not exhibit the formation and exercise of national character, as the motive power of national life, prompting to action and growing by use.

In attempting to follow out this line of thought, it is necessary to find a starting-point. I will not venture on speculations about the influence of race or climate, but will confine myself within the limits of recorded facts. I am not concerned with the origin of our national character, interesting as that may be, but with its nature and the forms in which it has declared itself in history.

Now the most important point about English history is that the English were the first people who formed for themselves a national character at all. We always tend insensibly to regard the past with the eyes of the present; and, though we know better, we think about the past as though nations always existed. A distinction, however, must be made between races and nations. Races or tribes came into history with certain characteristics which were doubtless the result of their previous conditions; but these conditions are unrecorded and can only be dimly conjectured. We can see these races mixing with other races, and entering into new surroundings. The result of this process is that populations become nations, because

they are united for common purposes, which are dictated rather by common experiences than by common conditions. In fact, nations, as we conceive them, are founded upon a consciousness of common interests and ideas, which are the result of long and complicated experience. That consciousness separates them from other nations who do not share those interests, and are consequently termed foreigners.

Our current conceptions of Europe and of European nations have grown up to account for a state of things which has gradually developed from something in which those conceptions had no place. When the northern folk invaded the Roman empire, their leader, in the first exuberance of strength and spirits, proposed to turn Romania into Gothia. But when he learned that 'the Goths would obey no laws on account of the unrestrained barbarism of their character, yet that it was wrong to deprive the commonwealth of laws, without which it would cease to be a commonwealth,' he resolved to restore the Roman name to its old estate, by adding Gothic vigour to its declining power. This conception of a united commonwealth of Romania corresponded to the needs and possibilities of the time, and found its expression in the theory of the empire and the papacy. Of this commonwealth the English formed part, and fully accepted all its benefits; but they seem to have set to work almost at once to creep out of their obligations towards it. No sooner was England united under one ruler, than there was some sort of feeling that it was a kind of empire by itself, and was not subject to any foreign superior.

I do not attach undue weight to the assumption of the imperial title by early kings; but it meant something, and indicated a native conception which steadily grew, till it found its final expression in the document which announced that England had entirely shaken off the medieval theory of politics: 'Where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same.'

As it was with the empire, so was it with the papacy. The imperial power was shadowy, that of the Pope was practically operative. But the English, while admitting it, steadily set to work to minimize its practical application to themselves. When the papal jurisdiction was abolished, it was not because it weighed heavily on England—precautions had been taken against that in good time—but because 'the English Church hath been always thought, and is at this hour, sufficient and meet of itself, without the intermeddling of any exterior persons, to administer its own offices and duties.'

When I say that England was the first nation to develop a national character, I mean that in very early times it showed a tendency to withdraw cautiously from the general system of Europe, and go its own way. It had a notion that England's interests were not the same as those of the continent, and were not covered by any general system which there prevailed.

This feeling was to a great degree unconscious, and is generally explained by England's geographical position. I do not, however, think that this explanation is adequate. For England's position was no security to it in early times, as the Danish settlements and the Norman Conquest sufficiently prove. Nor did that position influence it by setting before its rulers, as the chief object of endeavour, consolidation within natural boundaries. For a long time its military energies were directed to the continent, and the desire to expand within the limits of the island itself was never of supreme importance to the popular mind. The conception of national boundaries was the chief cause of the formation of nations on the continent. France and Spain became united kingdoms before Great Britain; and their national character was largely formed round the pursuance of that object. It was not so with England, which slowly absorbed Wales, waited for Scotland, and neglected Ireland. Its dominant motive seems simply to have been a stubborn desire to manage its own affairs in its own way, without any interference from outside. And this desire, whatever its origin may have been, lies at the bottom of the English national character, and explains most of its peculiarities.

One consequence of this cautious withdrawal from general European affairs was that England stood aloof from the general ideas which directed the movement of European politics. These ideas found practical expression in two great matters which powerfully affected men's minds; the Crusades, and the conflict

between the empire and the papacy. England was never stirred by crusading enthusiasm. The expedition of Richard I was a personal, not a national, matter; and Edward I went to the Holy Land to keep out of the way at home, and gain military experience in an accredited manner. So too in the ecclesiastical contest, England tried to express no opinion. When Anselm introduced it into England, it was discussed dispassionately, and Henry I showed a truly English spirit by devising a compromise, in which he kept all that he practically wanted. England's sympathies were on the whole with the emperor, but they were not effectively expressed. When Englishmen wrote on the subject, their arguments and opinions were intended for foreign and not for domestic consumption. England preferred to construct its political theories solely with an eye to its own political practice.

This is an important point, because it accounts in some degree for the fact that other peoples do not readily understand us. We have not at any time been swayed by the general ideas which have prevailed on the continent. We have declined to raise abstract questions, or commit ourselves to ideal schemes. Englishmen stood in the same attitude towards the great ideas of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as they observed towards those of the French Revolution. They were not caught by far-reaching principles, but considered them in relation to their own actual condition. They would not go beyond the limits within which they could see their way. We have never been able to express the meaning of our national life in the

terms of an ideal system which might be generally understood.

Yet I would not have you suppose that the English always disregarded abstract theories. On the contrary, they displayed great capacity for borrowing and expanding them when it was necessary. The development of the doctrine of the divine right of kings, and its practical application to English politics, may compare favourably with anything that was ever achieved abroad in a like direction. But when it had served its immediate purpose, and was carried too far, it was rapidly dropped and was exchanged for another theory which was more practically useful. Indeed, English politics show that the idealism of the practical mind is thoroughgoing for a brief space, but its very thoroughness prevents it from leaving any abiding trace. English politics are frequently ideal, but the ideals change rapidly, and the change is never defended by reference to principle, and is generally incapable of logical explanation.

I return to my main point—that England's aloofness from large ideas of general politics was due to its desire to manage its own affairs, and adapt its institutions to its own needs as they arose. This is expressed in the familiar fact that the structural part of English history is constitutional history, and that this constitutional history is exceedingly perplexing. It is difficult to refer the growth of English institutions to any very definite principles. Their development did not come from the expansive power of general ideas, but was largely the result of cautious adjustment to



the facts of national life. There was always a dread of the rigidity of any system, however excellent; and there was always a resolute maintenance of national, and even of local, customs, against attempts to read them into the terms of a consistent and orderly arrangement. This is equally conspicuous in our legal history. It has been said that 'it is in opposition to the canons and Roman laws that our English law became conscious of its own existence.' English customs were put into writing, not with a view to their codification, but that they might be maintained against a logical system which was being imported from abroad. When once they were formulated, they were stubbornly upheld. Nothing is more characteristically English than the famous refusal of the barons at the Merton Parliament to amend English law, in a trifling matter, that it might be in accordance with equity and with the practice of Christendom. 'Nolumus leges Angliae mutare' was the expression of an outburst of national conservatism, not directed against the proposed amendment in itself, but against the reasons by which it was supported. English law must remain because it was English; there was danger in admitting principles which might prove far-reaching.

The abiding result of this temper is, that in England no existing institution, or right, or claim can be explained without going back a long way. Foreign nations have to come to us to find the traces still remaining of their own historic past, which has been submerged by volcanic eruptions. This is not only a matter of archaeological interest, but carries with

it consequences which greatly affect us. Other nations may claim more glorious memories, or may speak in higher-sounding tones of national enthusiasm; but no nation has carried its whole past so completely into its present. With us historical associations are not matters of rhetorical reference on great occasions; but they surround the Englishman in everything that he does, and affect his conception of rights and duties on which actual life is built. I cannot illustrate this better than by quoting the saying of a witty foreigner, that if three Englishmen were shipwrecked on a desert island, their first proceeding would be that one would propose, and another second, that the third do take the chair. I need not follow out all that this implies. But one point deserves notice. The Englishman is content to live under complex and venerable institutions because he feels that their gradual growth is a guarantee that they were formed through a wish to deal with Englishmen as they are. He thinks that his laws and institutions were made to fit him, and he resents being pared down to fit them. Hence he is restive under simpler systems which are more rigidly applied. Who does not know the travelling Englishman, aggrieved because he may not argue the rights of his particular case, as against some general rule, which the native finds no difficulty in dutifully obeying? His grievance lies in the sense that the rule never contemplated his particular case at all, and yet that he is called upon to obey it. It is this which lies at the bottom of an Englishman's conception of tyranny. His sense of justice is not the same as that of peoples

whose law and institutions are more logical, and he labours under a defective sympathy with other institutions than his own.

There is, however, another consequence of the antiquity of our institutions, for which we undeservedly suffer in foreign estimation. We are responsible for having invented a form of government which suits ourselves, and seems simple in its main lines, but which really depends on so much beneath those main lines that it is unfitted for exportation. The methods of our parliamentary government have been freely copied; but, unfortunately, they owe their value in England, not so much to the excellence of the finished article, as to the long process of forging which it has undergone. English institutions, we know, depend for their success on the capacity of the English people to work them; and this depends on the solidarity of our national life, which underlies all mechanism, and gives that mechanism its native power. We can lend other peoples our mechanism; unhappily we cannot lend them our solidarity. Those who have borrowed from us feel a little sore that things do not work with them so well as they expected. Party government is an excellent thing, but the number of parties must be limited, and it is difficult to limit them artificially. It is well that ministers should be sensitive to public opinion, but it is discouraging when they are so sensitive that a ministry does not endure more than six months. I think there is a certain feeling that we have beguiled other countries and have advertised as a panacea a course of treatment which applies only to ourselves.

I have compared international relations to those of competing trading firms. Perhaps we do not sufficiently realize that we enjoy the advantages and disadvantages alike of being the oldest and longest established firm. We do not find it necessary to adopt the most modern methods, to follow the newest fashion of advertising, or to explain our procedure to everybody. We go on, with the consciousness of a long period of success behind us, and of an undoubted credit. It is not worth our while to put ourselves continually in the right; we are sure that we shall be justified by ultimate success, and can endure crises before which others would succumb. We are not particularly sensitive to the opinion of others, and are surprised to find that they are sensitive to our opinion, which we express with stolid openness. There are two forms of self-assertion, which may be distinguished by a remark which you will see did not originate in this University. That great question—the difference between an Oxford man and a Cambridge man—was once solved by the epigram: ‘An Oxford man looks as if the world belongs to him: a Cambridge man looks as if he did not care to whom the world belongs.’ I am not concerned with the truth of that saying in itself, but it undoubtedly describes two temperaments, which differ and annoy one another by a sense of difference. I think, however, that we must admit that the man who does not care to whom the world belongs is extremely annoying to the man who maintains that the world belongs to him. This is eminently the attitude of English-

men towards other countries. Foreigners rehearse their glories; they recount their claims; they point to their achievements; they elaborate their ideals. The Englishman listens unmoved, and does not even answer. It may be so; he does not care to dispute the matter; he is only sure that, whatever the future may be, there will be plenty of room in it for him to do much the same as he has done in the past—and that is enough. It is this particular attitude which leads foreigners to call us haughty, cold, and unsympathetic.

Indeed, we must confess that we have something of the hardness which goes with a long period of steady success. It requires an effort to see how exceptionally favourable has been the process of England's development when compared with that of other countries. It does not bear the marks of centuries of oppression from barbarous conquerors, of long struggles to realize national unity, of eager waiting for some man with a strong arm and iron will who might carry out the inarticulate wishes of a suffering people, of passionate outbreaks of national despair, of chimeras of universal happiness madly pursued, of dreams of universal empire ending in exhaustion. As we look around us we can see on all sides the abiding traces of these things on the characters of other peoples, traces of something fantastic, unreasonable, fanatical—call it what you will. But let us remember that suffering gives an insight into regions where thought cannot penetrate; and the man who has not suffered is wise if he learns some lessons from those who have. History should teach

us sympathy with the national past of other peoples. We should learn not to offend against the prejudices or fancies, as we may deem them, which are the inseparable result of all they have gone through. We should not be so uniformly and aggressively reasonable in the advice which we tender them so freely.

For there is about us this curious trait that, though we are averse from forming any decided policy for ourselves, we are always ready to advise others. This obviously involves a contradiction, which it is hard to explain to foreigners. Indeed, in nothing is the peculiarity of the English character more strongly emphasized than in the curious prominence which it has always given to the claim for free expression of opinion. Tennyson has caught the leading conception of liberty which has prevailed amongst us at all times when he describes England as—

‘A land where girt by friends or foes  
A man may speak the thing he will.’

Englishmen have always been more concerned with saying what they would than in being, or doing, what they would. There is more outspokenness, and expression of purely individual opinions and judgments in the medieval chronicles of England than in those of other countries. From the days of Walter Mapes there was a series of writers who gave their views about current affairs in political songs and satires. At the beginning of English literature stands Langland, burning with a simple Englishman's desire of saying his say about things in general. Hugh of Lincoln took Henry II by the shoulder and gave him

a good shaking, when he petulantly refused to listen to him. Grosseteste hunted Henry III from place to place, as the king fled before the scolding which he knew was in store for him. Englishmen always longed to speak out what was in their minds.

With this went a tolerance of opinions, which again distinguishes England from other countries. It was not till the end of the fourteenth century that England troubled itself to discover heresy, and then the motive was to arrest outbreaks of social disturbance. The notion of strict inquiry into opinions, and the infliction of punishment for them, was always very distasteful to Englishmen. It has been pointed out that the sufferers under Queen Mary were not more numerous than those under Henry VIII or Elizabeth; but Englishmen regarded their punishment with horror, because they suffered solely for their opinions as such, and not for the maintenance of social order or political security. In a dim sort of way it seems to me that Englishmen have always recognized that the solidarity of national life depends upon a practical agreement, and have shrunk from any repression of opinion which went beyond the limits of securing the minimum of agreement necessary for carrying on common life in tolerable order. There must be a common basis, and that must be secured. But it need not be a very large basis to be strong enough for its purpose; opinions as such must be left to settle themselves.

You will see that, in this process, all depends on a belief in the strength of the mutual understanding about the basis, i.e. about the real solidarity of our

national life. Because we trust in one another's ultimate sense of justice, we are ready to discuss anything and everything. But we ought to remember that other peoples have not necessarily attained to the same basis as ourselves, and do not look on opinions in the same way. I remember once trying to explain to a distinguished German why we did not fight duels at our Universities. I first said that we had other forms of athletic sports which we preferred: I described the charms of cricket, football, and boating. 'But,' he said, 'in all these men contend against one another.' I agreed. 'Then,' he pursued, 'they sometimes lose their temper and use injurious words.' I admitted sorrowfully that sometimes adverse opinions were expressed about the capacity of an otherwise respected colleague. 'Then,' he continued triumphantly, 'when a man is injured, he must redress his wounded honour by a duel.' This was quite logical; and I could only state the fact, without accounting for it, that it was possible for us to listen to disparaging comments on our failure to catch a ball without feeling personally wronged, or indeed paying any attention to them at all. Does not this difference of point of view indicate the real meaning of our political methods? There is so much free expression of opinion that we are hardened to it, and give it just so much attention as we think it deserves. We do not understand the sensitiveness of those who have not had the advantage of being born and bred among these bracing surroundings. I have been asked, when talking with foreigners about their affairs, if my opinions represent



those of Englishmen generally—a question which it never occurred to me to ask, and which I could discover no possible means of answering. I have seen a foreigner seriously produce an article from an English newspaper, three months old, as an indisputable proof of England's attitude towards his country. It is very difficult to explain to him that probably every variety of opinion has been expressed since then by the same newspaper, and certainly by other newspapers; and that I could undertake to furnish him with similar proof for any attitude of England which he most desired.

The truth is that every Englishman likes to express his opinion, if he takes the trouble to make one. What becomes of his opinion is a matter of secondary importance; he gives it to his fellows for what it is worth, and he knows that they will not attach to it an undue importance. At the best it will take years before it is likely to assume any practical shape; then it must be backed by a society with subscribers, and a secretary, and a monthly journal. Its ultimate success is so remote that he scarcely feels any personal responsibility for it at the time when it is first uttered. This is our form of political education; it would be impossible were it not that our commerce requires advertisements, which pay for the journal and its accompanying education. Other nations, whose industries are not so extensive, cannot afford this method, even if they had the materials for it. We should not judge them harshly on that account; and perhaps it would be kind on our part if we drew a sharper line of distinction between

the advice which we give to one another and that which we send abroad. I said that an Englishman expressed his opinion freely because he was not afraid that any one would attach much weight to it. But this does not apply to foreigners, who have a different view about the responsibility attaching to opinions, who are not accustomed to hold public meetings about the affairs of other countries, and who read separate utterances of individuals into an authoritative expression of a national policy. It is very difficult to explain to them our methods in a way which is not offensive to them or disparaging to ourselves. Yet the fact is that all the fire and smoke with us comes from a well-regulated bonfire; with them it would mean a conflagration.

Our air of condescension towards foreigners is certainly of long standing. I began by reminding you that England was the first country which displayed a strong national consciousness, and this involved a sense of separation from other peoples. The history of the thirteenth century is largely concerned with the persistent determination to purge England from foreign influences, and secure a purely national government. The pages of Matthew Paris are full of this English sentiment, which was directed equally against Italian ecclesiastics and the relatives of a Provençal queen. Characteristically English was 'the Association of those who would rather die than be confounded by the Romans,' who, under that title, sent a circular to the bishops bidding them not to interfere while they burned the barns in which these aliens stored their tithe. And

here, at Osney abbey, the students shot the cook of the legate Otho, who lost his temper at their free and easy ways. It was the cry of 'England for the English' that prompted the barons' war, and breathes through the literature which it produced. Yet even so, England judged not according to the letter. When foreigners were ordered to give up their castles, Simon de Montfort was included in the number; but England had need of him, and when those who were obnoxious had been got rid of, Simon was restored to his possessions. The earliest account of England from outside is that of a Venetian ambassador in 1497. He says: 'The English are great lovers of themselves and of everything belonging to them. They think that there are no other men like themselves, and no other world but England; and whenever they see a handsome foreigner they say that "he looks like an Englishman," and that "it is a great pity he should not be an Englishman"; and when they set any delicacy before a foreigner, they ask him "if such a thing is made in his country."' Early in the reign of Henry VIII, Sir Robert Wingfield argues in a magnificently English manner, 'As the English nation has always surpassed the French in valour and good faith (I do not wish to speak invidiously), so it cannot be judged inferior to it either in antiquity and dignity, or in the size of its territory, or in its learning and capacity.' 'Valour and good faith,' these are the primary and practical qualities which the Englishman has always claimed as conspicuously his own; then he is prepared to argue that all other good qualities follow naturally from their possession. I have spoken of some points

in which we misunderstand foreigners ; there is a point in which they misunderstand us. Our valour they do not deny, but our claim to conspicuous good faith is not equally clear in their eyes. Good faith is to some degree a matter of opinion, and a reputation for it is only gained by scrupulous care. It cannot be won by a few heroic achievements. While we think of all the disinterested things that England has done, other countries think of the hindrances she has placed in their way that she might maintain her own interests. I am afraid that they often regard her humanitarian pleading as so much hypocrisy, and suspect some ulterior motive behind. Though they are wrong in so doing, we should remember that their error is natural, and that it is to some degree our own fault, if they do not know how simple and straightforward we really are.

I return to the fact that England early displayed a sense of stubborn independence of foreign influences. It was largely due to the Norman Conquest that this did not mean isolation, but only independence, which showed itself in assimilating what was in accordance with the national temper, and rejecting what was not. It is curious to trace this in the development of architecture. The impulse came from the Normans, but the English soon gave the Norman forms a meaning of their own. One point will serve to illustrate the tenacity of the English traditions. The great Norman churches were of basilican form terminating with an apse. Little by little, in subsequent days, English architects replaced them by the rect-

angular chancels to which they had been accustomed in their simple churches. Indeed, the whole process of the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture was a gradual reversion to the primitive form of the Celtic building. So was it with the movement of the Renaissance. England remained unmoved by it so long as it was a foreign importation, and only received it from her own scholars, when it assumed the practical form of serious criticism. The national form given to the New Learning enabled England to withstand the influence of the Reformation on the continent, and work out its own ecclesiastical changes on its own lines. Not till this was accomplished did the literary and artistic impulse of the New Learning find an expression in the reign of Elizabeth, moderated and inspired by the vigorous awakening of a new consciousness of national greatness in an altered world. I need not pursue this subject. It is enough to call your attention to the slow and deliberate way in which since then England has weighed and valued the productions of continental thought, literature, and art, and has selected from them just what she needed. It stands in striking contrast to the rapidity with which other nations have received impulses from England, and have at times been dominated by them.

I have been attempting to show that, on whatever side you approach English history, you find Englishmen always animated by a stubborn determination to manage their own affairs in their own ways according to their own needs. To this definite end their energies have always been directed. They have not been

desirous that things should look well, or be capable of clear explanation, so much as that they should work well. They have paid little heed to fashions in thought or activity, but have insisted on looking into things, and considering what they were worth to themselves; and at the same time they have always been ready to take what they thought was worth having. Consider that remark about stalwart and handsome foreigners, which seemed so characteristic to the Venetian ambassador: 'It is a pity he is not an Englishman.' The Venetian regarded it as an expression of national arrogance. Surely it was an expression of a large-hearted appreciation of excellence, wherever it was to be found—an appreciation which at once assumed the practical form of a readiness to appropriate. Combined with a ready recognition of the man's charm went a regret that that charm was not always exercised for their benefit. 'Talis cum sis noster esto' is a recognized form of compliment. Probably no Venetian would have thought an individual Englishman worthy of his admiration. Certainly he would never have wished him to be a member of his republic. If he had thought aloud, most probably he would have reasoned, 'I am glad such a man is not in Venice; if he were, he would stand in my way.' The Englishman was below such reasoning and above its conclusion. He admired frankly, and regretted that what he admired did not belong to his country. There was no covetousness in his remark, no thought of compulsory annexation; but he could not help feeling how useful such a man might be in England. Is not this a parable

of the Englishman's point of view? It is really simple and spontaneous: it is so easily interpreted as arrogant, or covetous, or both.

The Englishman's country was dear to him, because all that it contained was home-made, and intelligible, and corresponded in a very real way to himself and his requirements. 'A poor thing, but my own,' he might perhaps say sometimes when he contrasted it with the great monarchies of Spain and France. The sixteenth century saw this long cherished independence of England seriously threatened; and the menace made Englishmen realize, as they had never been called upon to realize before, all that their country meant for them. At the call of danger they entered upon a full knowledge of the value of their birthright and of the individual powers with which their country had endowed them. Driven back upon their own resources, they strained every nerve to make the most of such advantages as they possessed, and to use every opportunity of securing others. Then for the first time did they fully appreciate the benefits of their geographical position, and set to work to make the most of them. Commerce, industry, seamanship, adventure, all assumed those forms with which we have ever since been familiar. The modern Englishman came into definite existence—not different from his ancestors, but the same—endowed only with greater self-consciousness, because compelled to adapt himself to larger problems. Forced into conflict with the power which claimed to possess the New World, he found himself, to his own surprise, superior in all

the qualities which betokened lasting success. With this discovery came an exhilarating sense of a national destiny, a foremost place in the world's affairs, which has remained with England ever since.

All this has been so well set forth by the two illustrious men who lately held the chairs of history at Oxford and Cambridge that I need not dwell upon it. But I wish to prove the permanence of the type of English character; and I can best do so by telling you the story of an Elizabethan Englishman, which I take almost at random. It may serve to show that the expansion of England did not arise from any policy on the part of English governments, but that our international relations are the result of the spirit of commercial adventure which animated the English people as soon as the events of the sixteenth century afforded an opportunity.

In 1554 Robert Tomson, of Andover, sailed from Bristol to Cadiz to make his fortune. He went to Seville and found there an Englishman, John Field, who had been settled for twenty years, with his wife and family. Tomson learned Spanish and looked about him. Seeing the produce which came from the West Indies, 'he did determine with himself to seek means to pass over to that rich country, whence such a great quantity of rich commodity came.' Field was caught by his enthusiasm, and set off with his wife and family to Mexico. On the journey they suffered shipwreck, but were saved by another vessel. They lost all their goods, and landed 'naked and distressed' at San Juan de Ulloa. There, however, Field met an



old acquaintance in Spain, who generously supplied their needs, and gave them means to pursue their journey to Mexico. On the way Field and most of his family died of fever bred by the pestilent country. Tomson was ill for six months, but found even there a Scotsman who had been settled for twenty years, and by his recommendation found employment, in which he prospered for a year and a half. Then he fell into a theological discussion one day at dinner, and conducted it with all an Englishman's self-sufficiency. 'It is enough to be an Englishman to know all about that and more,' was the remark, he tells us, of a bystander. He was delated to the Inquisition, was condemned to do three years' penance, and was sent back as a prisoner to Seville. On his release he took the post of cashier in the office of an English merchant, and then chanced to meet a lady who had sailed from Mexico with her father who died on the voyage. Finding her unprotected, and the possessor of some £25,000, he chivalrously married her, and recounts the fact 'to show the goodness of God to all them that trust Him.'

In this story we have all the characteristics of the modern Englishman—an adventurous spirit, practical sagacity, a resolve to succeed, a willingness to seek his fortune in any way, courage to face dangers, cheerfulness under disaster, perseverance in the sphere which he has chosen. Moreover we find him, even in those early days, personally acceptable in the land where he goes, valued for his capacity and probity, treated with kindness and consideration, exciting no

animosity, and intermarrying with the folk amongst whom he lives. Yet all the while he remains every inch an Englishman, does not change his ideas or modify his opinions, cannot hold his tongue when he is challenged, but is ready to put everybody right. Finally, because of these very qualities, he inspires such confidence in his general uprightness that a defenceless girl feels secure under his protection and commits herself and her possessions to his care.

The strength of Englishmen in the present day is admitted to lie in their practical capacity. This is only an application to the sphere of individual life of that desire to manage their own affairs in their own way, which I have traced as the leading feature of English history. Let me give you an example of the way in which this capacity shows itself, to the bewilderment of foreigners who do not consider the centuries of experience which lie behind it. A cosmopolitan, free from particular prejudices, once gave me an account of his observations as a student in an important technical college on the continent, where his fellow students were drawn from every nationality. He told me that in class work the English rarely distinguished themselves, and often made colossal blunders, which excited mirth. But when the class was over, and all adjourned to the workshops, where a practical problem was given, the case was different. 'The German,' said my informant, 'took out a note-book, and immersed himself in long calculations. The Frenchman walked about and indulged from time to time in ingenious and often brilliant suggestions. The Englishman looked

out of the window and whistled for a while; then he turned round and did the problem, while the others were still thinking about it.' I do not profess to find any moral in this story. I simply tell it you for what it is worth.

I have dealt very superficially with a large subject. The only practical conclusion I can draw is that, being what we are, we must try to make the best of ourselves. To any one who wishes to pursue the subject further—and a lecture such as this should end with a suggestion of further study—I would venture the suggestion that an analysis of the conception of liberty, as it exists in different countries, would be fruitful of results. That conception expresses itself in the claims of the individual on society. Not the least remarkable feature in English history is its lack of picturesque and emancipated individuals. The Englishman has never learned to conceive of himself as detached from his surroundings, as having an inalienable right to do, or be, exactly what suits him best, without regard to the legal or moral rights of others. He takes with him, wherever he goes, a notion of liberty which is associated with duty and justice; and this is the secret of his success as a civilizing agent. I cannot close my fragmentary remarks more fittingly than by quoting some words of Hegel: 'The material existence of England is based on commerce and industry, and the English have undertaken the weighty responsibility of being the missionaries of civilization to the world: for their commercial spirit urges them to traverse every sea and land, to form connexions with barbarous

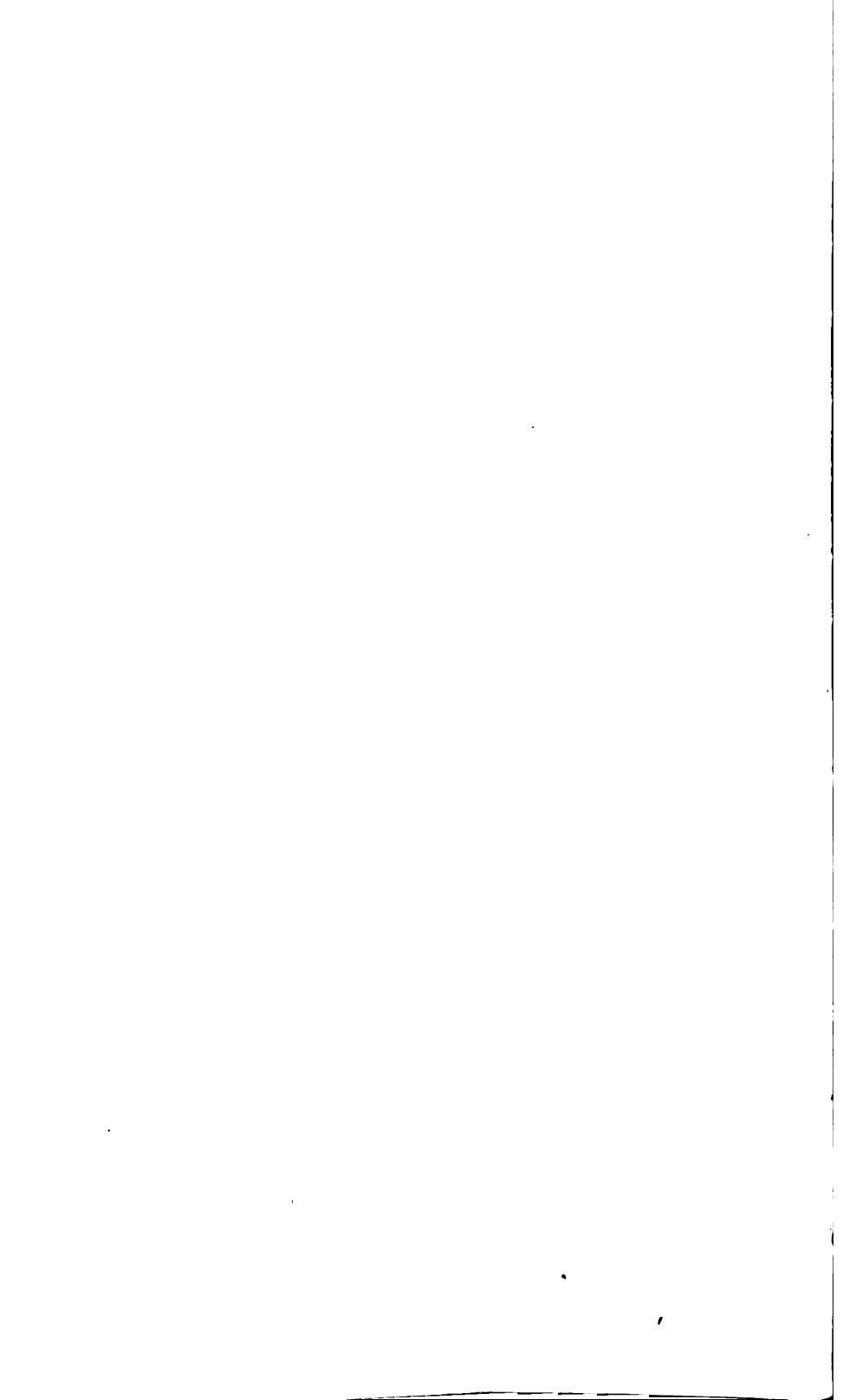
peoples, to create wants and stimulate industry, and first and foremost to establish among them the conditions necessary to commerce, viz. the relinquishment of a life of lawless violence, respect for property, and civility to strangers.'

These words were written in 1820; nothing has since occurred to diminish their force. I have been showing you how England has been fitted for that high destiny, and for a due sense of the responsibilities which are inseparable from it.



**Oxford**

**HORACE HART, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY**







12/21

9

27









APR 11 1939

