CHAPTER THREE

Heroism and Chivalry:

"To Interpret Patriotism Worthily"

For a Trafalgar Cenotaph
Lover of England, stand awhile and gaze
With thankful heart, and lips refrained from praise;
They rest beyond the speech of human pride
Who served with Nelson and with Nelson died.

A great deal of Newbolt's successful early verse took as its subject either one or a group of English heroes who were active patriots in the Elizabethan tradition and who also shared the values enshrined in the chivalric code. Heroism, chivalry, and particularly patriotism are concepts that have altered considerably since the late-Victorian age, not least because of the cataclysmic changes in thought brought about by World War I.

At the heart of much of Newbolt's poetry was a concept of heroism and the hero that, while it has not completely vanished from twentieth century life, is no longer given much emphasis and is certainly no longer used as a role model for young children in the way that it was in Newbolt's day. This concept, though undoubtedly influenced by Carlyle's 1840 lectures, does not see the hero in Carlyle's almost transcendentally terms, as the man with divine insight into the inner reality of existence—the man who reveals Truth to his loyal and reverent followers—but as a man primarily of action, whose selfless and courageous
deeds, motivated by chivalric ideals and usually performed in the service of his country, provide an inspirational model to emulate.

Just exactly why so much emphasis came to be placed on this kind of heroism as an object of aspiration is not easy to determine, but it certainly has to do with the nineteenth-century stress on individual strength (and, paradoxically, on brotherhood), with the stress laid on aspiration itself, and, by the time Newbolt went to school, with the increased secularization of thought and education.

By the 1860s, as David Newsome reminds us, "godliness was veering towards manliness," and "good learning" was becoming increasingly secularized. There were many complex reasons for this, but particularly crucial were the new techniques and approaches that science was using to look at the world: Darwinism, of course, but also the many fierce disagreements over Biblical scholarship and criticism. It was not that good learning became totally agnostic, especially not, as we have seen, in the public schools. "Nonetheless," Newsome points out, "the new requirements for the study of Biblical criticism put theological researches beyond the reach of the average well-educated clergyman, and scholars—in their turn—saw the necessity of studying problems without reference to fundamental Christian beliefs." The effect of this in the schools was less a move away from Christianity than an attempt to blend it with other life-codes—in particular, certain classical ideals and the chivalric code—that were seen as being morally good but that had, in certain cases, non-Christian elements to them. Another connected effect was that much less stress was placed on the kind of spiritual piety and zealous service to God that Arnold, for instance, had advocated, with the emphasis shifting to more secular notions of service to school, to country, to Empire.

Newbolt went to school at a time of Imperial consolidation, when the more dazzling feats of pioneering in wild outreaches of the Empire were decreasing, but at a time when public enthusiasm for the growth and security of the Empire was at its height. The twofold result of this in public schools such as Clifton was that stories of courage, endurance, loyalty, and adventure abounded, plus it would have occurred to very few to question the motives behind these heroes' actions. We need to remember that, perhaps especially as far as public schools were concerned, Empire-building was not simply a matter of patriotic zeal (nor,
as was sometimes later assumed, of moral imperative), nor was the idea of Empire "sold" solely on those grounds:

There was also a deliberate and sustained attempt to appeal to a spirit of adventure. The [school] magazines regularly contained thrilling tales of old boys in jungle, savannah and desert with titles which could have graced the novels of Kingston, Henty and Rider Haggard—One Hundred Days Upon the Nile; Further Adventures from Kandahar; Through Africa to Lake Nyasa; With the Chitral Relief Force by a Subaltern. Soldier heroes fought, won and lived and either returned to the school to recount their deeds, albeit modestly, and thus inspire imitation, or sent the school editor vivid descriptions of action in Zululand, Afghanistan, Sudan, Benin, Burma and many other places.3

Such tales were also, doubtless, recounted by the Clifton Old Boys in their letters to Wollaston and recorded by Oakeley in his Register of achievements, bringing even closer such physical manifestations of heroism, and filling Newbolt, one suspects, with excitement and inspiration. Some such feelings he must have had, for when he came to write his own tales for boys from 1912 to 1920—The Book of the Blue Sea, The Book of the Thin Red Line, The Book of the Long Trail, among others—he wrote primarily tales of real-life heroes (soldiers, sailors, explorers, hunters) engaged in actions of bravery and involved in great adventures. They were tales designed to do for his boy readers what presumably those earlier tales had done for him, as he intimates in one of the books:

Any man, if he is lucky, may have adventures, and yet remain quite an average man, nothing out of the common. A great man is great, not because he happens to have adventures, but because he is the cause of adventures; to meet him is in itself an adventure, and makes a change in those who experience it.4

All the tales not merely narrate the exploits and adventures of their heroes, but they also illustrate those very qualities that Newbolt was taught to admire so much.

These were qualities that we have touched on earlier—qualities of "fortitude, self-reliance, intrepidity: devotion to the common weal: readiness for united action and self-sacrifice"5—qualities that were seen as virtues almost without question in the schools of the 1870s. What was being passed on to Newbolt was a notion of the hero not unlike this one, from an essay written by a member of the generation before Newbolt's:
Charles Kingsley. In his essay "Heroism," Kingsley pictures the modern hero as being a fusion of the Greek hero, as rediscovered during the Renaissance, the "active and manly" Medieval hero of chivalry, and the "more tender and saintly" hero of the earlier Middle Ages. These three fused elements have, he says, inspired a literature in which "the saintly, the chivalrous, and the Greek heroic, have become one and indistinguishable..." The "perfection of heroism" is self-sacrifice, which must be voluntary and "above though not against duty," and which must involve more than mere courage. True heroism always puts aside self, and contains what Kingsley calls "simplicity":

Whatsoever is not simple; whatsoever is affected, boastful, wilful, covetous, tarnishes, even destroys, the heroic character of a deed; because all these faults spring out of self. On the other hand, whenever you find a perfectly simple, frank, unconscious character, there you have the possibility, at least, of heroic action.

But he reiterates that nothing can be thought of as heroic if it goes outside duty: "though heroism means the going beyond the limits of strict duty, it never means going out of the path of strict duty." He sees heroism as something that everyone can and should strive for in everyday life.

This is very similar to what Newbolt was taught at Clifton, and there appears little doubt that the virtues implicit in heroism continued to hold a widespread value in England during the second half of the century, ensuring that when Newbolt's poems first appeared in the nineties, there would be a receptive audience.

But there does remain one puzzle. Many boys went to Clifton and to other public schools like Clifton during this period, and all of them would not only have been taught the same doctrine, but would for the most part have accepted its worth. They did not all, however, go on to write as extensively on it as Newbolt did, nor were they all as deeply affected and influenced by it as he was. Something in his nature and circumstances reached out and embraced the doctrine, with its emphasis on the heroic virtues, though one can only speculate as to why this should have been so, for he has left us few clues.

His imagination may well have been fired from a young age by the fact that his grandfather, Captain Charles Newbolt, had served with Nelson's fleet, thus providing young Henry with a ready-made hero in the family, and, moreover, with a hero of the sea, which was where the
adult Newbolt’s heart was going to remain. Coupled with this is the fact of his father’s death when Newbolt was not quite four, which left him with another absent, yet mythic figure in his life. His mother grieved intensely for her husband, dreamed of him incessantly, and talked much of what a good man he had been to the little boy. As titular head of the household from a young age, Newbolt became very close to his mother, who, he said, transfused his personal life with her own, but, while he did not lack male “heroes” in his own family, he did lack male guidance in his everyday activities and in his imaginative explorations. He did not mourn his father at the time, for he never really knew him, but a sense of loss grew on him as he got older, and may have contributed to the fact that for much of his life he found a need for the sympathetic and supportive friendships of men older than himself.

Newbolt read vast quantities of books when he was a child, many of them Romances and adventures, such as the novels of Walter Scott. With no male adult to direct his reading, or to discuss with him what he had read, one wonders how much he internalized these literary heroes, saw their deeds for his own, and carved for himself a land full of imaginary heroes and their exploits. Presumably because of his reading, he developed an early passion for heraldry, with all its connotations both of medieval knights, pageants and tournaments, and of the historical continuity of great families and great deeds. This was a passion that never left him, and was a part of his passion for history itself, something that he endlessly tried to promote through his writing (rather than to romanticize, as he has sometimes been accused of doing). From all the stories he read, from the history he knew, and from his interest in heraldry, Newbolt would have entered school with certain ideals that could only have been reinforced by the ethos of the day, and that in itself would have made those ideals more than usually strong by the time he left.

The upholding of his ideals publicly was both the contribution that he saw himself most fit to make to what he believed in, and also importantly for him, a perpetual link with his own youth and with the place that probably meant more to him than any other. One of his contemporaries at Clifton was the very active Colonel Francis Edward Younghusband, to whom he wrote an “Epistle” in September 1904, from which this revealing passage comes:
Long since I saw what difference must be
Between a stream like you, a ditch like me.
This drains a garden and a homely field
Which scarce at times a living current yield;
The other from the high lands of his birth
Plunges through rocks and spurns the pastoral earth,
Then settling silent to his deeper course
Draws in his fellows to augment his force,
Becomes a name, and broadening as he goes,
Gives power and purity where'er he flows,
Till, great enough for any commerce grown,
He links all nations while he serves his own.
Soldier, explorer, statesman, what in truth
Have you in common with homekeeping youth?
“Youth” comes your answer like an echo faint;
And youth it was that made us first acquaint.

After which, he enters into a vivid and lovingly remembered description of a close race that he ran with Younghusband twenty-five years before at Clifton. The place haunted him; the ideals that it stood for were the strong thread that kept him bound to it, of which notions of the hero and of heroism were to remain vital components.

Another ideal that informed both Newbolt’s life and poetry was, of course, chivalry, from whose code he took standards, aspirations and images that appear time and again in his work. He wrote about chivalry both for children and adults: his novel *The Old Country*, for instance, involves its hero travelling back in time to 1356; *Aladore* is an allegorical romance set in the Middle Ages; he wrote about and retold Froissart’s *Chronicles*; and his poetry is shot through with chivalric ideas and images, in the poems concerning the glory of English history, but also in those about love and even about nature, as this 1897 poem, “The Invasion” reveals:

> Spring, they say, with his greenery
> Northward marches at last,
> Mustering thorn and elm;
> Breezes rumour him conquering,
> Tell how Victory sits
> High on his glancing helm.
Smit with sting of his archery,
   Hardest ashes and oaks
       Burn at the root below:
Primrose, violet, daffodil,
   Start like blood where the shafts
       Light from his golden bow.

Here where winter oppresses us
   Still we listen and doubt,
       Dreading a hope betrayed:
Sore we long to be greeting him,
   Still we linger and doubt
       "What if his march be stayed?"

Folk in thrall to the enemy,
   Vanquished, tilling a soil
       Hateful and hostile grown;
Always wearily, warily,
   Feeding deep in the heart
       Passion they dare not own—

So we wait for the deliverer;
   Surely soon shall he come,
       Soon shall his hour be due:
Spring shall come with his greenery,
   Life be lovely again,
       Earth be the home we knew.

Newbolt's interest in chivalry began before he went to Caistor (he opens *The Twymans* with the ten-year-old Percival Twyman spending his afternoon with the Middle Ages, as he puts it, and executing an extremely careful and rather streaky painting of the family shield), but this was then reinforced at the school, where the boys were intrigued by the presence in the local church of a possibly thirteenth-century tomb of a knight whom they called Sir William de Hundon:

This tomb in the church furnished us with a symbol of all those thoughts and feelings which have come down to us under the name of Chivalry—or under the even better description of *idées chevaleresques et raisonnables*. The result was good for us, and congenial to us—we were an ingenuous lot, made of the common clay: we believed in fighting, not as a means to any policy or domination, but as a burden, a service to be undertaken at the call, and endured
as the chosen alternative to dishonour. The idea is not now so popular as it was: but it served my generation well, for we spent our lives among warring nations, and in grave anticipation of the supreme danger which broke upon us at last.\(^\text{10}\)

This was the beginning, then, of an idea which remained important to him after he had grown up: that fighting (both physically and intellectually) was something that had to be undertaken if the alternative was dishonour—if by not fighting, the weak would be oppressed or an honourable ideal lost. It was also the beginning of the idea that the chivalric code might provide a form of values by which to live one’s life, a form not always comfortable, perhaps, but one that offered a strong moral guiding force. In *The Twymans*, Newbolt writes about the influence on young Percival of “the Crusader,” meaning partly the stone effigy of the knight in the church, but on a deeper level what the knight stands for:

[T]he ghostly hand of that companionship was firmly clasped upon his arm, and at times lay heavy as steel upon his shoulder for restraint or compulsion. To walk with such a friend, disembodied, unobtrusive, but inflexible, meant to obey this instinct and reject that, without considering reasons: to pick out, for instance, between quagmires the right way of thinking about woman—for even before his fourteenth summer a boy will have his notions of love. It meant also the acceptance—again without knowing why—of heavy burdens: the burden, for one, of deliberate courage, the burden of foreseen defeat. Not perhaps until twenty years afterwards did Percy realise that, as he stood among the many coloured caskets of magical human passions, the saving choice had been suggested to him again and again by a voice from that past which the wisdom of to-day derides as mediæval.\(^\text{11}\)

It seems clear that the Crusader walked with Henry as well as with Percival, and that here again he took ideals with him to Clifton that were to be heavily reinforced by the teaching there.

John Percival, the first headmaster of Clifton, upheld the chivalric code with a religious zeal that permeated the entire life of the school. These beliefs, according to Newbolt, he presented to the boys as a system by which they should enter into the corporate life of Clifton:

The System was a good one, which was capable of being pressed too far. It was a Roman Rule, peculiarly fitted to the needs of the English schoolboy, presented to us by a man of fine character and magnificent presence, demanding of us the
virtues of leadership, courage and independence; the sacrifice of selfish interests to the ideal of fellowship and the future of the race.\textsuperscript{12}

The boys responded to Percival’s system by setting up their own code of conduct, in which overt displays of emotion were frowned upon, and self-mastery, decency, endurance, and self-sacrifice were highly revered virtues. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch backs up Newbolt’s perception here, adding:

We were caught up in a cult of Roman stoicism and service suffused with Christianity; and some of us suffered. But this, too, resulted in some fine by-products—notably an Arnoldian consciousness of moral responsibility (too precocious perhaps) with a certain puritan scorn of defilement in conduct or speech. There could hardly have been, by instinct through habit, a cleaner school in England.\textsuperscript{13}

Newbolt himself found the suffusion with Christianity extremely attractive, although he admits that it was only after leaving school that he fully understood what he had received from Percival’s doctrine:

The idea that our fellowship was not merely a power, a pleasure, a public service, but that it alone, in a wider form, could confer upon our individual lives significance, growth and immortality—that corporate life was being offered to us as the miniature and pattern of Christianity itself—this struck our hearing only and found no echo for many years after.\textsuperscript{14}

John Percival preached endlessly in the school chapel about his chivalric ideals of corporate life and service, and no boy could have left Clifton at that time without having at least partially understood what Percival’s creed was. Years later, when he was writing \textit{The Twymans}, Newbolt reproduced an entire Percival sermon, and quoted from it again when he later came to write his autobiography. The sermon begins with a discussion about corporate life:

Even the least thoughtful among you cannot have been here long without becoming aware that our character as members of a society or fellowship is something different from our individual character when we are living apart or in solitude. There is a latent fire in our souls which does not burn up till it gathers an accumulated force by the contact of life with life. . . . We here in this congregation are not merely the same six or seven hundred isolated souls that we should be if scattered over a wide area and unknown to one another. As we sit here side by side, with one purpose and one aim, uttering the same words,
thinking the same thoughts, stirred in some degree by the same impulses and penetrated by the same influence, our spirit moves as it were all together, in something like a rhythmic harmony; we feel that something has been added to us, that we are not the same as before we met.15

Note how strong is the assumption that all his congregation will be sharing the same words, thoughts, impulses, and values. It is an assumption that could not so easily be made today, and it demonstrates how far we have come from the Victorian idea of what constituted corporate life, and, in another way, why it had so much value for those who subscribed to the idea. Percival goes on in his sermon to show how this ideal of corporate life, and thus school life, is bound up with patriotism and ends with this final exhortation:

Next to a pure and blameless life the greatest virtue which any of you can exercise, in this place and afterwards elsewhere, is that which you know by this name of public spirit. If you cultivate the sense of brotherhood, which lies at the bottom of that quality, and denounce everything that is mean or selfish, or in any way opposed to it, then you cannot fail to sow the seeds of a good life, which will grow by your efforts, as time goes on, into a life that can never die.16

John Percival was among many public school masters of the time who extolled such a concept of corporate life, of brotherhood, of a chivalric and essentially Christian code, and it was a concept widely accepted by those to whom it was taught. Yet in trying to understand Newbolt’s generation’s attitude to war, for instance, we might question the total compatibility of chivalry and Christianity, as indeed it was questioned at the inception of chivalry during the eleventh century. “The Christian citizen,” suggests Steven Runciman in *The First Crusade*, “has a fundamental problem to face: is he entitled to fight for his country? His religion is a religion of peace; and war means slaughter and destruction.”17 The Byzantine Church continued to be against war, as the early Christian Fathers had been, while the Western Church supported the defence of the Christian Empire:

Saint Augustine held that wars might be waged at the command of God; and the military society that had emerged in the West out of the barbarian invasions inevitably sought to justify its habitual pastime. The code of chivalry that was developing gave prestige to the military hero; and the pacifist acquired a disrepute from which he has never recovered.18
This Christian justification of wars that are "right" or "just"—holy wars with "God on our side"—has continued to bedevil our understanding of war right into the twentieth century, and it was compounded in Newbolt's day by further combinations of conflicting values in the public schools: the injection of Spartan rather than Athenian ideas, plus Roman virtue, directly into notions of chivalry and a developing sense of public service.

With hindsight, it appears that men such as John Percival, who embraced and advocated this public school ethos, unintentionally disguised the moral complexities of war. For what gets subsumed by this ethos is the fact that war itself is a trade-off that demands from those engaged in it hideously difficult compromises between fighting effectively and being Christian. What became increasingly clear from early on in the Boer War to the end of World War I was that any comparison between war and a game breaks down through the difficulty of determining what are the rules, when each new and more lethal weapon necessarily calls for a change in these rules. The public school interpretation of chivalry undoubtedly caused some confusion in the attitudes of Newbolt and his contemporaries to war, and certainly caused a later generation to revile those attitudes. Nevertheless, we should be aware that it occurred to no one (not even to contemporary critics of the system) that the public school ethos of the time was trying to combine perhaps equally good, but in many respects incompatible values in the promotion of its own version of the chivalric code.

Twenty years after he had left Clifton, Newbolt, now editor of the *Monthly Review*, was still very much concerned with the moral contribution of the chivalric ideal, which he did believe introduced Christian elements into the business of war that helped to counteract its darker, purely brutal side. In February 1901, he tackled this subject in an editorial in the *Monthly Review*, suggesting among other things that "when dawn rose after the Dark Ages, it was seen that the evil element in war required an antidote. The Age of Faith found one, and named it Chivalry." The second Boer War was still very much in progress at this time, with the British making bloodily sure that their humiliations in the first campaign were not repeated, and chivalry must have been a rather unwelcome topic to those who were supporting current British tactics. At any rate, Newbolt seems fully aware that he was not necessarily preaching to the converted, for he goes on: "We can imagine the
contemptuous surprise with which this word will be received by those
who do not agree with our view: indeed, it is not now a fashionable word
with any class among us. Chivalry?—that old, stale, obsolete, foolish
thing?” Given the sureness with which he and his fellow students had
accepted the chivalric ideal as a universally held value twenty years
before, this is an interesting indication that a shift in sensibility had
already occurred, helped along not a little, one presumes, by the Boer
War itself. But Newbolt is, of course, quite unrepentant about continuing
to promote his ideal. It is old, he says: “Yes: it is as old as the divine
spark in man, as stale as running water, as obsolete as the human pulse;
as foolish as all lights that shine in darkness.”20 And he never did cease,
in one way or another, to promote it.

The twofold idea that had its first seeds sown at Caistor—that chivalry
was both a life-code and a code without which war is totally evil—had
its fullest exploration outside the poetry in a book of tales about chivalric
deeds, written for boys at the end of World War I. The 1901 editorial
was called “The Happy Warrior,” a title borrowed from Wordsworth,21
and Newbolt returned again to it for this book, calling it The Book of the
Happy Warrior.

In 1918, he was prepared to concede a shift in what might now
constitute a chivalric ideal, but in no way prepared to give up the notion
of it: “We have done, perhaps for ever,” he tells his boy readers, “with
the pageantry and symbolism of chivalry, but we shall see how far it is
from being obsolete as a faith and a way of life if we imagine it formally
refounded and its principles restated in modern fashion.”22 The Boy
Scout movement and the League of Nations are what he is referring to
here, for the war had served to convince him more firmly than ever of
the need for a world-wide embracing of the chivalric code, not a sliding
back into the barbaric slaughter of the trenches that had just been
witnessed. What he suggests in the book is that the chivalric ideal should
be taught not only in public schools and universities, but to every boy
from every kind of background all over the world:

The widening of the chivalric fellowship is the more vitally necessary because
its principle is not one for soldiering only; it is good for all social life, national
and international. If it were universally adopted it would free the world at once
of both militarism and pacifism. The militarist cannot see that aggressive war is
a monstrous and inhuman crime; the pacifist cannot see that to stand aside, in
sight of wrong and oppression, is a monstrous and inhuman crime no less. Both agree in speaking of Peace as if it were simply the opposite of War, as if it were attained whenever physical force is not resisted by physical force.\textsuperscript{23}

If it may be argued that Newbolt's insistence on the continued upholding of the chivalric code seems at best out-dated, and even at the worst naive, it is not because many of the values enshrined in the code are no longer considered to be values, but because they can no longer be certain of being interpreted objectively or universally, and because the form in which they are being expressed is no longer a congenial one to many people. Before dismissing the ideas in \textit{The Book of the Happy Warrior} as outmoded and Victorian, we might consider this exposition of Newbolt's chivalric ideal, written in the preface:

\textit{It is the ideal of those who realise that victory, success, possession, power, are not the first or most valuable things in the world; they come second by a long way to the value of certain spiritual things, which are the real making of life, and which we call by many common names, such as kindness, humanity, decency, honour, good faith—whatever they are called, we know them well enough, and we know that to give them up under any circumstances whatever, would be a loss greater than any defeat or death.}\textsuperscript{24}

Even though we at the end of the twentieth century might not instinctively connect these values to the notion of chivalry, we would be likely to accept them as values, nonetheless: values, however they are expressed and however they are interpreted, whose worth has continued to endure over time.

If the use of the word chivalry seems inappropriate or alien to us in our modern world, the word patriotism has retained its resonance, yet we might well have difficulty in achieving a universally agreed definition; indeed, beyond saying rather vaguely, "love of country," we might not succeed in this task at all. This is not a difficulty peculiar to our own times, for it also existed around the turn of the century, partly because of the complex feelings engendered at that time by the Empire and by the Boer War, partly because this era signalled the beginning of the shift towards more personally-held values, and partly also because patriotism has rarely manifested itself in one straightforward way but has tended to be interpreted according to shared or individual need or inclination.

The whole notion of patriotism tends to call up deep, unquestioned (and therefore not always consciously rational) feelings in people,
making it a difficult subject to analyze without over-simplifying the issue. However, if we allow that any parts into which the concept is divided are themselves likely to provoke a wide range of response, it is possible to clarify the issue to some degree.

J. H. Grainger begins his book, *Patriotisms*, by suggesting that patriotism involves, or may involve, four different strands of loyalty: loyalty to the country itself, the fatherland, the *patria*; loyalty to brothers, to the tribe; loyalty to the place of birth, the known piece of land; and loyalty to the laws of the country, its traditions and, in the case of England, its freedoms. "The point is simple," Grainger says:

> [W]hen patriotism inhered in such clear and simple loyalties as instanced here, in personal relationships between ruler and ruled, father and son, between brother and brother, in familiar earth or in sacred laws, the *patria* was not, as it commonly is today, a source of much confusion... There was a time when loyalty was to person, to land or immemorial laws. Characteristically, the patriot committed himself not to an idea, but to king, brothers, land or laws which sustained him. The precept was *pro rege, pro domino, pro fratribus* or, of course, *pro patria, mori.*

Grainger goes on to discuss how muddied these clear and simple loyalties could become. But for Newbolt and his like-minded contemporaries educated in the 1870s and 1880s, patriotism meant something very close to this direct adherence to king (or queen) and country, one's fellow Englishmen, English countryside, and English ideas of freedom and justice. In general, the emphasis tended to lay most heavily on an active, even aggressive loyalty to country and Empire, and on a quieter, but not necessarily less intense, love of the land itself and of an often particular piece of English countryside.

This emphasis is supported in an essay called "A Literature for England," by Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson, who also see patriotism as being a complex concept, yet one in which certain strands can be clearly discerned:

> Distinctions have to be made, and were made in the period [1880-1920], between different forms of patriotism. The most salient of these is a distinction between forms of declamatory, cajoling and uplifting patriotism and a non-aggressive, sometimes non-militaristic, patriotism invested in ideas of the national character, its traditions, and a unifying love of country.
What they suggest in this essay is that these two strands of patriotism became particularly strong parallels as World War I approached, parallels that were personified at the start of the war by Rupert Brooke, who “combined the ruling-class values with which Britain entered the war, giving expression to both the sense of pastoral England as ‘Home’ and the readiness for self-sacrifice in the service of a nation at war.” These two strands of patriotism are not easy to name succinctly, as each contains within itself a complex of loyalties, yet as we need to be able to distinguish between them, we might allow the one to define a more heroic (and active) form of patriotism, the other to stand more quietly and personally for love of the land. Thus, for want of more exact words, we may call the first strand the heroic, and the second, the pastoral.

The feeling of closeness between these two strands at the start of World War I is further illustrated by Edward Thomas (who wrote so beautifully of England and English countryside), noting in 1914: “Throughout English history you have the two elements combined inseparably, love of the place where you ‘have your happiness or not at all’, and a more fitfully conscious love of the island, and glory in its glories,” which second element, he feels, manifests itself more in times of trouble. “England is a system of vast circumferences circling round the minute neighbouring points of home,” he says, finding the aggressiveness of the heroic strand not much to his liking.

In fact, while the pastoral strand would continue throughout the war, and go on beyond it, this was the last time that the heroic strand would appear in quite this form. In a 1924 book called Patriotism in Literature (dedicated “To Henry Newbolt, poet and patriot”), John Drinkwater supports the notion that the pastoral strand was felt, by this time, to be the dominant one: “Love of country,” he writes, “expressing itself nobly, as we have seen, in service, in supreme sacrifice, or in mystical devotion, is yet perhaps in nothing so intimate and tender as in the passion the patriot feels for the very earth of his familiar habit.” And while there were men and women who would willingly, and from strong and passionate feelings, serve their country in World War II, the readiness for self-sacrifice in a noble (and shared) cause, so central to those notions of chivalry and the hero inculcated by the public schools, would no longer dominate in the way that it had before the First War. Feelings about fighting would become more personalized, more internal. To take a World War II example, the young poet Jonathan Wilson (who enlisted
directly after he left his public school in 1942 and was killed in 1944) wrote for his book of poems a preface entitled "1939 Answers 1914." In it, he tried to explain why, knowing full well about the horrors of war from those who fought in World War I, he and his generation were again fighting:

Our philosophy? Who can tell it exactly? It is something personal and universal, mine and everybody's. No slogan unites us, but a belief, perhaps, that we must save the right to live our ordinary life in our own ordinary way. For ultimately we do not fight for home and country, but for the principles these symbols enshrine. We fight for life, our own private life that we know so well.31

For himself, he is fighting to keep his personal faith with God, and it is the reiteration of this private, individual belief that what he is doing is right that separates him so markedly from his father's generation of soldiers. And while the pastoral element of patriotism is more evident in the poems than in the preface, the heroic element is nowhere to be seen.

The point that the pastoral (and more personal) strand overtook the heroic is one of many indicators foretelling the fall in popularity of Newbolt's work after the fervour with which World War I began started to fade in 1916. For although Newbolt himself was, in fact, someone in whom the two strands ran parallel for much of his life, the early poetry for which he was best known leant most heavily to the heroic strand—to a chivalric notion of patriotism that became less and less valued or accepted.

If the pre-World War I period can be seen to contain two distinct strands of patriotism, it is also true that within these strands there were differences existing which preclude any easy labelling of those then living. For instance, Newbolt and Kipling have often been linked together as two patriotic poets of the same era, as if that label actually has a definitive meaning that helps us to see the similarity between these two writers. In fact, although one can argue that there are similarities in the 1890s when both men were engaged in celebrating (in their very different styles) England and her Empire, and although both men undoubtedly shared strongly heroic patriotic feelings, these feelings took quite different forms and were quite differently expressed. Because people have continued to link the two men together, usually to Newbolt's disadvan-
tage, it might be useful, therefore, to consider the patriotism particular
to each.

"Newbolt's almost sacramental English patriotism, lofty, deliberate,
enlightened, was quite distinct from that of Kipling," says J. H. Grainger,
for Kipling's first loyalties were to the Empire. His "Englishry was
provoked during and after the Boer War when he began to have doubts
about England as the nursery of those virtues which the Empire and the
world needed." It was then that Kipling's patriotism began to take the
form of denouncing what he saw as the enemies within: "The enemies
were the liberal mind, liberal institutions and liberal politicians busily
incapacitating England for action in a dangerous world. Integrally the
foe was an England in which men had become the disinterested spec­
tators of their own history." Apart from the fact that Newbolt held
staunchly liberal views, his poetry celebrated English glory, tradition,
and ideals, with no denunciatory aims whatsoever.

Kipling criticized England for her own good as he saw it, but of course
the public was less enthusiastic, and when "The Islanders" came out in
1901, with its basic appeal to take organized games less seriously, and
national service much more so, many people were both infuriated and
offended, with perhaps some cause, as this, probably its most famous
stanza, might indicate:

And ye vaunted your fathomless power, and ye flaunted your iron pride,
Ere—ye fawned on the Younger Nations for the men who could shoot and ride!
Then ye returned to your trinkets; then ye contented your souls
With the flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddied oafs at the goals.

Kipling’s biographer, Charles Carrington, believes that this poem hit
rather more than its intended target: "No earlier pronouncement of
Rudyard's had touched so many victims on the raw. It flicked the old
conservatives on a tender spot, hurting them more than it hurt the hostile
hide-bound radicals who cared little for criticism from this quarter." What is certain is that for Kipling it heralded a period of patriotic concern
that was different from his pre-Boer War mood, and as different as it
could be from Newbolt's.
Some have seen this poem as demonstrating a diminished patriotism, and that certain of his contemporaries were indeed touched on the raw by his attitude is amply shown in a 1905 essay by G. K. Chesterton called "On Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Making the World Small." Chesterton suggests that Kipling loved England for her greatness, not for herself. He argues that what Kipling so admired about militarism was "not the idea of courage, but the idea of discipline," and that he could have found this in other empires and other armies besides the British:

The great gap in his mind is what may be roughly called the lack of patriotism—that is to say, he lacks altogether the faculty of attaching himself to any cause or community finally and tragically; for all finality must be tragic. He admires England, but he does not love her; for we admire things with reasons, but love them without reasons. He admires England because she is strong, not because she is English.

He also accuses Kipling of being too much the traveller, so that to him England is merely another place, whereas to the true patriot, the notion of place vanishes. The more deeply you love England, the more the rest of the world is your foe.

What is interesting about this view is as much what it tells us about the patriotism of G. K. Chesterton as what it tells us about Kipling's. This patriotism inspires instinctive feeling and is not always logical. Its heroic strand is clearly based on a notion of courage (one of the qualities important to the hero) that is seen as being particular to England, and its parallel, but stronger, pastoral strand exhibits all the contempt of an Englishman born and bred towards one whom he regards as having no roots in England, and therefore no understanding of things English. So angry is Chesterton that his reaction in the essay is in imminent danger of being not merely patriotic, but jingoistic, and while this was presumably not quite the effect that Kipling intended, he certainly succeeded in his intention to stir up debate.

Even Newbolt joined in, first in an editorial in the *Monthly Review* in February 1902, entitled "The Lordliest Life on Earth," in which he criticizes the poem not for the warning it contains, which he considers at least partially justified, but for Kipling's essential misinterpretation of the English character. A year later, in February 1903, Newbolt returned to the subject when he published a poem of his entitled "An Essay on Criticism" in the *Monthly Review*, deprecating Kipling's move
away from the pleasures and enchantments of his early work and containing, among other gentle jibes, this parody of "The Islanders":

"So well I love my country that the man  
Who serves her can but serve her on my plan;  
Be slim, be stalky, leave your Public Schools  
To muffs like Bobs and other flannelled fools:  
The lordliest life (since Buller made such hay)  
Is killing men two thousand yards away;  
You shoot the pheasant, but it costs too much  
And does not tend to decimate the Dutch;  
Your duty plainly then before you stands,  
Conscription is the law for seagirt lands;  
Prate not of freedom! Since I learned to shoot  
I itch to use my ammunition boot."

An odd way this, we thought, to criticize—  
This barrackyard "Attention! d— your eyes!".37

Almost forty years later, George Orwell was amazed that Kipling could ever have been seen as a patriotic poet at all:

In the stupid early years of this century, the Blimps, having at last discovered someone who could be called a poet and who was on their side, set Kipling on a pedestal, and some of his more sententious poems, such as "If," were given almost Biblical status. But it is doubtful whether the Blimps have ever read him with attention, any more than they have read the Bible. Much of what he says they could not possibly approve. Few people who have criticised England from the inside have said bitterer things about her than this gutter patriot. As a rule it is the British working class that he is attacking, but not always. That phrase about "the flannelled fools at the wicket and the muddied oafs at the goal" sticks like an arrow to this day....38

It could be suggested, however, that those who dismiss Kipling's patriotism, or see it as becoming diminished in the post-Boer War era, are misjudging him because they are not being exact enough about the label that they have hung around his neck. He was patriotic, and he never ceased to be patriotic, but the form in which he expressed his patriotism changed. This was partly, no doubt, because of his move back to England and the English countryside of Sussex, where he settled, but it was partly also because he believed that the liberal direction in which English
politics and thought was going was misguided and dangerous, and he wanted to do something about it.

If we stay with George Orwell for a moment, we can see another man whose patriotism motivated criticism of and warnings to his country. He also provides an interesting example of how if the pastoral strand of patriotism changed little, the heroic strand lost its self-sacrificial, chivalric underpinning and became far more closely allied with an intense love of country. In fact, he is an example of the curious fusing of the two strands that was happening by World War II. "His patriotism is important," his biographer, Bernard Crick, tells us. "He was almost alone among Left-wing intellectuals in stressing the naturalness and positive virtues of loving, not exclusively but none the less intensely and unashamedly, one's native land." Certainly he was what Crick terms a "revolutionary patriot," seeing the land as being the heritage of the common people, and not merely of the upper classes, but he was a patriot nevertheless, whose patriotism "became very much linked to defending 'the country' as symbolised in the countryside."

In August, 1939, the night before Ribbentrop went to Moscow to sign, with Molotov, the Russo-German pact, Orwell dreamed that the war had started:

It was one of those dreams which . . . do sometimes reveal to you the real state of your feelings. It taught me two things, first, that I should be simply relieved when the long dreaded war started, secondly, that I was patriotic at heart, would not sabotage or act against my own side, would support the war, would fight in it if possible. . . . What I knew in my dream that night was that the long drilling in patriotism which the middle classes go through had done its work, and that once England was in a serious jam it would be impossible for me to sabotage. But let no-one mistake the meaning of this. Patriotism has nothing to do with conservatism. It is devotion to something that is changing but is felt to be mystically the same, like the devotion of the ex-White Bolshevik to Russia.

That last sentence (apart from the Orwellian simile) is remarkably close to something that Newbolt felt deeply: that England continually changes through time, and yet simultaneously remains the same, with certain elements and characteristics that recur, thus keeping the English people in mysterious touch with their history. Orwell's heroic/pastoral admixture of patriotism was also close to Newbolt's, the difference being in the form of the heroic strand and in the emphasis on the pastoral.
Newbolt never entirely successfully reconciled the two strands in his writing as Orwell did, apparently finding it difficult to express his devotion to the English countryside in verse, a fact which has led to a weight being placed on the more heroic form of his patriotism, which is curiously unreflective of the whole man. That he did feel that the two strands were interlinked is made quite evident in this passage from his novel *The Old Country*, which so clearly expressed his own patriotism that he quoted it in the second volume of his autobiography:

"I love this country," she said; "I love it as I love nothing else in life. It is to me everything that men have ever loved—a mother, a nurse, a queen, a lover, and something greater and more sacred still. There is not one look of it that I shall ever forget or cease to long for, and I would as soon kill a friend as change the name of the smallest of its fields." . . .

"I understand," he said; "but I had almost forgotten that patriotism could be so intense and yet so local."

"If you forget that," she replied, "you forget all. Patriotism has its own high spiritual thoughts, but it has a body too—very earth of very earth, born of time and the land, and never to be found or made: it is as human as our other passions, instinctive and deep and unreasonable, and as hot as the blood by which we live." 42

Newbolt, however, found it difficult to capture both patriotic strands in the poems that he wrote, and one can only speculate as to the possibility of this being a contributing factor to the gradual decline in his publishable poetry as time went on and as the emphasis within the notion of patriotism shifted. One early poem that first appeared in *The Island Race* in 1898, and that does attempt such a fusion, is "Homeward Bound":

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After long labouring in the windy ways,
On smooth and shining tides
Swiftly the great ship glides,
        Her storms forgot, her weary watches past;
Northward she glides, and through the enchanted haze
        Faint on the verge her far hope dawns at last.

The phantom sky-line of a shadowy down,
        Whose pale white cliffs below
Through sunny mist aglow
        Like noon-day ghosts of summer moonshine gleam—
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Soft as old sorrow, bright as old renown,
There lies the home of all our mortal dream.

This vision of England evokes both the land and a sense of its history with a quiet intensity that cannot be denied. But despite poems such as this, Newbolt's first volumes of poetry remain more heroic than pastoral, more representative of the Percival doctrine and the formal teaching he had received at Clifton, and less revealing of the more personal relationship that he had with the English countryside. They also remain, however, expressive of a patriotism that is suffused with an awareness of history and tradition, that cares deeply about sharing its ideals, that does not blindly love the mother country to the exclusion or harm of others, but is desirous of promoting her gifts and of actively serving her needs. One of the original twelve poems in *Admirals All* was called "The Dictionary of National Biography" (later retitled "Minora Sidera" when it was reprinted in *The Island Race*), which was written for Leslie Stephen, the first editor of the Dictionary:

Sitting at times over a hearth that burns
With dull domestic glow,
My thought, leaving the book, gratefully turns
To you who planned it so.

Not of the great only you deigned to tell—
The stars by which we steer—
But lights out of the night that flashed, and fell
To-night again, are here.

Such as were those, dogs of an elder day,
Who sacked the golden ports,
And those later who dared grapple their prey
Beneath the harbour forts:

Some with flag at the fore, sweeping the world
To find an equal fight,
And some who joined war to their trade, and hurled
Ships of the line in flight.

Whether their fame centuries long should ring
They cared not over-much,
But cared greatly to serve God and the king,
And keep the Nelson touch;
And fought to build Britain above the tide
Of wars and windy fate;
And passed content, leaving to us the pride
Of lives obscurely great.

Here we have Newbolt's ardent patriotism, but it is neither offensively militaristic nor over-loud in its pride. What the poem expresses is the importance that tradition had for him, for Newbolt saw history very much in terms of tradition to be passed on to each new generation.

W. B. Yeats, after reading The Island Race, wrote to Newbolt:

You have set many wise and true and beautiful things to rhyme. Yours is patriotism of the fine sort—patriotism that lays burdens upon a man, and not the patriotism that takes burdens off. The British Press just now, as I think, only understands the other sort, the sort that makes a man say "I need not trouble to get wisdom, for I am English and my vices have made me great."

This is an appreciative realization from Yeats (about a month before the Boer War ended, and at a time when Newbolt's poetry was still in step with the tenor of the times) that this is poetry that will make its readers question the nature of their own patriotism, and not merely blindly shout "Hurrah!" when they have finished reading it.

Another critic, less sympathetic, who accused Newbolt (in a January 1898 Athenaeum review of Admirals All) of writing poems that did merely shout "Hurrah!" provoked a heartfelt defence of patriotic poetry from Newbolt. The first was in a letter that although he withdrew from publication, he kept forever, and the second in a poem called "The Non-Combatant," a reply to the critic that was printed in the Athenaeum.

This exchange is interesting because it reveals not only the kind of adverse criticism that the poetry received when it was at the height of its popularity—quite different from later criticism—but also Newbolt's early "poetic": his apology for patriotic poetry, particularly that of an heroic nature. The critic felt that the extravagant welcome accorded to Admirals All reflected the poor taste of the general reading public, and that patriotic verse was anyway not poetry:

Patriotism, an excellent virtue in a citizen, is to a poet a somewhat dangerous master. . . . Now it is quite possible for a poet to write a good poem on war, war in the abstract, or even a particular battle, though it has not often been done, and the chances are against his doing it. War is an unintelligent barbarism, which,
at all events, remains picturesque, and affords undoubted opportunities for undoubted heroism. But if a poem about war is to be really a poem, war, certainly, must be treated in the grand manner and with sufficient intellectual remoteness. The moment you become a partisan you cease to be a poet. "The strength and splendour of war": it is just possible that a poem might be written about that, though hardly by a writer who could use such an expression in his poem. But "the strength and splendour of England's war": that is a limitation of the poet's unlimited prerogative which can hardly, save by one of those miracles which occasionally happen, result in poetry.45

In the heart of his reply to this, Newbolt presents his critic with two imaginary cases, both referring to himself in different poetical moods:

First, a man to whom heroism, and even mere courage and the primitive passion for the fight, appeal strongly, expresses himself according to his nature and abilities: not in a composition of hundreds of lines . . . but in a song, a short burst of three or four stanzas. Is it so certain that his verse must of necessity fall short of poetry . . . ?

The second case is that of a man whose general point of view in regard to human destiny is that there is an ordering of the world: that this ordering is worked out through national character: that for shaping national character, and its component, individual character, war has at times been a "most perfect instrument." Such a man may say to himself, "Among my countrymen have been some whose character and deeds went, consciously or unconsciously, towards the establishing [sic] of an ideal England as a world-wide and world-guiding power. That their memory is helpful, I know: I have felt it so myself, and I have seen old men . . . broken in health and fortunes, thinking the less of their own weakness and obscurity and coming death, for their recollection of . . . the strength and splendour of England's war" and their "faith in all the Island Race." I cannot imitate these heroes, but I will commemorate them." Then comes one and touches his arm, in the market-place, and says magisterially, "You mistake: that cannot be poetry."

Is it true? Do both lyrical and ethical poetry exclude the patriot? The spiritual force of resolute and devoted men: the memories and hopes of a great nation—are these "a limitation of the poet's unlimited prerogative which can hardly result in poetry"? I can only hope not.46

After sending this letter to the editor of the Athenaeum, he withdrew it, fearing that it would prove too controversial (and perhaps too defensive), but "The Non-Combatant" holds much of the same sentiment, express-
ing the hope of the patriotic poet that although he is “no man’s chosen
captain; born to fail;/ A name without an echo . . .” he is also the keeper
of the “ancestral rites,” the one who hands on the glory and the history
of his country to the combatants:

Perchance some looked beyond him, and then first
Beheld the glory, and what shrine it filled,
And to what Spirit sacred: or perchance
Some heard him chanting, though but to himself,
The old heroic names: and went their way:
And hummed his music on the march to death.47

This exchange has been quoted at length because it seems to come very
close to being at the heart of what prompted Newbolt to write the kind
of poetry he did at the turn of the century, and because it is the sentiments
expressed here that those readers who disagreed with the Athenaeum’s
critic responded to so positively. To sing of English heroism, to com­
memorate the glory of English victories, to pass on to the heroes of today
the rich history that was their heritage—this seemed to Newbolt to be
an important and rewarding, indeed almost inevitable task. “[W]hether
he cares to admit it or not,” Newbolt was writing as late as 1924, “every
poet does in fact owe much of his material, and of the mental formation
which governs his expression, to the thought and feeling of his own
nation, past and present.” And the ballad writer in particular has always
“expressed a greater self, a national self, from which he drew his
particular power, and for which he spoke so well that he perpetuated
what he had received.”48

Newbolt was passionate about keeping history alive so that its con­
tinuing tradition could be always visible, and so that the whole race for
generations past could be an inspiration for those who would serve their
country today. H. G. Wells once accused him of wasting his loyalty and
love by being too devoted to objects of the past, and of over-using Clifton
as a symbol of tradition: “You believe in the ‘Great Age’ in rare
moments,” Wells wrote, “but your heart is with Clifton and the accidents
of your own life. . . . You care for associations, your thought is thick
woven with associations, with all the mellow, homely, sturdy, gallant
things that stir the heart.”49 Wells, of course, had a different vision, and
this accusation came out of an amicable debate that the two had on
looking to the future versus looking to the past. Newbolt felt that this
difference between their two visions "was a real contrast and a curious one," and saw it in terms of how loyalty operates:

I believed that the business of Poetry and Loyalty is with the concrete, the real, that which has come into existence: not with the abstract, the hypothetical, that which has never been and may never come to be. It seemed to me that if man had notice that the world’s lease would expire within a fixed time, his loyalties to mankind would be no longer possible—service and devotion are offered not to an imaginary race, but to one which falls within the same continuing process as ourselves. 50

For Newbolt, there could be no other vision; what Clifton symbolized for him was an ideal to dedicate his life to, one in which everything was done in God’s name, and with God watching over all: "For any man with this belief there can be no difficulty about the service of Man, or loyalty to the Past, since it is to the Designer that our allegiance is given, and He is outside Time. To Him the Future of the Race is not a hypothesis, nor its Past a graveyard." 51

Newbolt’s patriotic feelings modified slightly as he grew older; the heroic patriotism that inspired his most popular poetry mellowed and became more affected by his increasing love of countryside, and his view of war was obviously affected by World War I, but he never essentially changed his beliefs. The England of the 1920s and early 1930s depressed him first and foremost for its loss of faith in the country (and what it had stood for), and its nihilistic view of the future. In January 1925, a reviewer in the Observer quoted this short passage on patriotism by Joseph Conrad:

Patriotism [is] a somewhat discredited sentiment, because the delicacy of our humanitarians regards it as a relic of barbarism. Yet neither the great Florentine painter who closed his eyes in death thinking of his city, nor St. Francis blessing with his last breath the town of Assisi, were barbarians. It requires a certain greatness of soul to interpret patriotism worthily—or else a sincerity of feeling denied to the vulgar refinement of modern thought which cannot understand the august simplicity of a sentiment proceeding from the very nature of things and men. 52

Commenting on the ending of this piece, Newbolt wrote with glee to Alice Hylton the next day: “Did anyone score so many disabling hits in one sentence before? I warm both hands before such a fire as that.” 53