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King Arthur and the Historical Myth of England:
A Child's Guide to Nationalism and Identity in the Victorian Era

By

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Introduction

"And inscribed on his tomb, men say, is this legend: HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX

QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS."[1] King Arthur has been a figure of attention for hundreds of

years, and interpretations of his legend can be found in countless forms. As the Arthurian saga

promises his return, his legend is forever open to retelling and reinterpretation. Arguably the

most famous and popular retellings occurred in nineteenth-century England during the Victorian

era in England, spanning approximately the length of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901).

During the Victorian era, Arthurian legend pervaded British culture, and King Arthur indeed

returned to England, not for the last time.

The Victorian era is also heralded as the "Golden Age" of children's literature, due to the

new, developing concept of children as their own special category of people with unique needs.[2]

With an increasing focus on childhood, elementary education was made mandatory and children

in schools were encouraged to learn British history through history primers. This new focus on

children coincided with a revival of King Arthur's prominence, and several adaptations of the

subject were created specifically for children. These adaptations held similar principles and goals

as the history texts used in elementary schools at the time. My thesis seeks to examine the ways

in which the revival of Arthurian narrative in the Victorian era spilled over into children's

literature, and how imperialistic narratives were used as tools of patriotic indoctrination in

children's education, particularly of those attending compulsory elementary school. The parallels

between the narratives of King Arthur children's stories and the narrative of history primers used

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[1] Sir Thomas Malory, Keith Barnes, Robert Graves, et al., *Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur: King Arthur and the Legends of the Round Table: A Rendition in Modern Idiom* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), 502.

[2] Debra N. Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995), 101.

in schools exposes itself when examining the ideas of imperialism, identity, and patriotism in both.

Several authors have covered the topic of the rise and impact of Victorian medievalism in the nineteenth century. Alice Chandler's *A Dream of Order* explains the literary origins and effects of the medieval revival in the Victorian era, and *History and Community: Essays in Victorian Medievalism* tackles several aspects of Victorian medievalism, including artwork and popular culture. Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* similarly expands on this idea, providing a comprehensive overview of how the code of medieval chivalry was revived and implemented into the lives of people in Britain from the late eighteenth century to the start of World War I. Study of the revival of Arthurian narratives in the Victorian era, particularly through the mediums of art and literature, can be seen in Inga Bryden's *Reinventing King Arthur: The Arthurian Legends in Victorian Culture* and Debra Mancoff's *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend Through Victorian Eyes*. However, little attention has been paid to the spillover effect of this reinvigoration on children's stories of the same time period in England. J.S. Bratton's *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* and Kimberley Reynolds's *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain 1880-1910* provides historical context to explain how children's literature came into existence as a genre, and what that kind of fiction looked like in the nineteenth century. Similarly, *Adapting the Arthurian Legends for Children: Essays on Arthurian Juvenilia* provides a basis for the enduring charm of King Arthur stories for children, although it does not focus at length on adaptations from the Victorian era. Several Victorian Arthurian narratives for children, including those written by Sir James T. Knowles, Sidney Lanier, and Margaret Vere Farrington, present contemporary examples of how the language of myth and the lessons of imperialism were utilized in children's stories.

Historians have analyzed the rapid growth of education and the methods by which history was taught to children during this time period. *Benefits Bestowed: Education and British Imperialism* supplies a series of essays that explained the change in the educational system in Britain in the nineteenth century, and clarifies how imperialism played a large role in the study and teaching of history to children. Peter Yeandle's article, "Englishness in Retrospect: Rewriting the National Past for the Children of the English Working Classes, c. 1880-1919," also helps outline the ways in which history primers were used as imperial propaganda so that working-class children in particular would feel attached to the British nation. Several British elementary school history primers from the late nineteenth century, including those by Cassell, Archibald Dick, and Charlotte Mary Yonge, offer a thorough background of the ways in which British children were taught the past, and demonstrate how the history of King Arthur was approached in elementary schools. Hugh MacDougall's *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* provides a foundation for England's myth of origin and how it adapted over time, explaining the language of myth. However, the scholarly conversation lacks an exploration of the connection between King Arthur stories for children and elementary school history primers, and the similar language and lessons that the two employ. My thesis intends to serve as a bridge between these two subjects in order to investigate the connection between them, as doing so will reveal a more ample groundwork for understanding the tenuous relationship between history and myth and fact and fiction in education, and how this relationship shaped cultural attitudes in the Victorian era in Britain.

The Rise of Victorian Medievalism

Prior to 1707, when Wales, Scotland, and England formed Great Britain, these countries maintained separate governments and identities.[3] After their union, the inhabitants of these countries reconsidered their identities as tied to a unified Great Britain, and this change, combined with the recurring wars between France and England throughout the eighteenth century, led to the rise of a distinctly British national identity. During this time, Great Britain was forced to define itself as a united front against an outside country, which the British imagined to be "superstitious, militarist, decadent, and unfree."[4] While a general sense of national identity existed in the 1700s, the constitution of British national identity in the nineteenth century is more complicated. For one, even though the term "British" implies the inclusion of Wales and Scotland, the majority of British history that emerged and was taught at the time focused primarily on England's exploits and achievements.[5] British national identity was also complex in that it was composed of external factors, including the idea of the nation as an empire, as well as internal factors, including an image of unity as the nation underwent great social and industrial changes.

During the late eighteenth century, the French Revolution provoked disgust and opposition to change in England. The violence of revolution in France, involving the overthrow of the traditional government, the disintegration of the societal structure, and the subsequent execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, led many British politicians and advocates to favor existing institutions and authority in leadership. By the early nineteenth century, changes

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[3] Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.
[4] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging a Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), qtd. in Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity,* 4.
[5] Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 8.

brought about by the French Revolution caused the elite, influential classes in England to fear that the same kind of hierarchical breakdown would occur there, too.[6] In 1820, an anonymous political work entitled *The Round Table* was published in England, promoting the idea of a strong monarchy, arguing that the monarch's duty was to "protect the possessions of opulence, the fruits of industry, and the personal safety of all."[7] At the same time, England was also undergoing major economic and social change. An economic crisis throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s raised questions as to whether the contemporary economic and social structures could cater to the problems of both the urban and rural poor.[8] In order to combat changes that might disrupt the existing hierarchy in England, conservative members of the elite and educated classes turned to a historical past that could accommodate their arguments in favor of the established structures. They found their ideal historical precedent in the form of the Middle Ages, sparking the medieval revival.

Along with these social and cultural attitudes, and in keeping with the principles of medievalism, another significant aspect of the medieval revival was the reintroduction of Arthurian legends. It was certainly not a coincidence that the author of *The Round Table* titled his piece as a reference to Arthurian legend. King Arthur is a figure whose story is elusive and the facts of his life and history remain muddled and mythical today. The first text to mention Arthur is Nennius's *The History of the Britons*, which dates to the eighth century, though many

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[6] Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot, Chivalry, and the English Gentleman* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), 22-23.

[7] *The Round Table. The Order and Solemnities of Crowning the King: and the Dignities of His Peerage with Remarks in Vindication of Both* (London: 1820), qtd. in Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 61.

[8] Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 62.

versions of the legend soon followed.[9] One of the main sources of information relating to King Arthur in the medieval period stems from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, a twelfth-century work heavily scored with patriotic propaganda that attempts to create a national hero for Great Britain, offering inspiration through the praise of the nation's ancestors. *The History of the Kings of Britain* was only the start of such attempts, as the Arthurian story became more widely accessible throughout the next few centuries. Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, first published in 1485, is a work that portrayed King Arthur as a majestic and just leader, and his knights are chivalrous and honorable. Malory's work greatly contributed to the Arthurian revival of the nineteenth century, as Victorian adaptations frequently cite *Le Morte d'Arthur* as the basis for their material.

King Arthur was particularly fitting for the rising concept of Victorian medievalism because the legend maintains the idea that Arthur will one day return as king of England when the country is most in need.[10] Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* was reprinted in 1816 and 1817, gaining wide appeal and gathering mass readership for Arthurian legends. Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, published in 1859, drew from Malory's work and became immensely popular. Tennyson differed from Malory significantly in his style of writing; Malory's work reads more as a factual account of the story of King Arthur, and Tennyson's version uses imagery and poetic verse to tell the stories. The success of Tennyson's adaptation encouraged other writers to attempt various imitations and modifications of Arthurian legend. By mid-century, King Arthur was pervasive in many forms in England, including furniture,

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[9] Inga Bryden, *Reinventing King Arthur: The Arthurian Legends in Victorian Culture* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 9.

[10] Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 14-38.

paintings, novels, poetry, and plays.[11] In a way, the reintroduction of King Arthur in the Victorian era served as a way for King Arthur to figuratively return and "save" Great Britain from the perils of social, political, cultural, and economic strains caused by industrialization, at least according to the upper classes.

England began to establish a glorified history for itself because of the tension occurring between classes and communities within the country. As Great Britain simultaneously expanded its empire geographically, the idea of a national identity was imperative for a sense of unity to exist. History books became immensely popular during the time period, and they almost exclusively focused on England's achievements as a nation, without particular regard for any outside countries—"the historian's task was merely to describe and applaud."[12] Doing so meant compiling both fictional and factual elements of England's past, and no figure was as well known or as highly associated with the history of England as King Arthur.

To understand the relationship between King Arthur and the recognized, "authentic" history of England at the time of the rise of Victorian medievalism, one must also understand the function of history as a concentration during the time period. At the time, history was generally considered to be a subdivision of philosophy rather than its own area of study. The growing desire to unearth the nation's past and recover its record during the Victorian period led to an interest in uncovering more about King Arthur, as well; however, the so-called history of King Arthur was lacking in definitive sources. Thomas Babington Macaulay states in *History of England, Volume I* in 1848 that "…Arthur and Mordred are mythical persons, whose very existence may be questioned, and whose adventures must be classed with those of Hercules and

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[11] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur,*16.
[12] Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 49.

Romulus."[13] Even so, it was not of great importance to the Victorians that the historical tradition

of King Arthur was contradictory and possibly fictitious; the relationship between England's

mythical past and its literature grew more intertwined and inseparable. As Bryden argues, "by

the last decade of the nineteenth century, Victorian Arthurians were acutely aware of their

contribution to the manufacturing of Arthurian myth: the remodeled Arthurs were more

culturally revealing than the question of whether an original or authentic King Arthur actually

existed."[14] The re-telling of King Arthur through many different formats is indicative of the

historicism of the time, as well as the very nature of the myth of King Arthur.

The nineteenth century's fixation on altering and styling King Arthur to fit cultural

preoccupations is also an example of the tenuous and ever-changing legend of King Arthur

throughout history. Arthur, then, was very much a mythical figure, and the general public knew

and accepted this; in fact, the myth only enhanced his fame and reputation. A growing interest in

fairy stories was concurrent with the rise of Victorian medievalism, and served as a form of

nationalism in that it created a celebrated folklore for the country. The desire to rediscover the

story of Arthur and his place in English history was largely for the same purpose: to establish an

English hero, an ideal for the public. Along with the idea of medievalism, the concept of a

national myth laying the framework for an imagined, restored society became deeply prominent

in the time period, and King Arthur fell conveniently into the desired framework. Chandler

argues that there are two parts to the concept of Medievalism: naturalism, including the heroic

codes of action of simpler times, and feudalism, which imagined earlier social structures as more

stable and harmonious. Both aspects contribute to the idea of establishing a "coherent world

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[13] Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England, From the Accession of James II: Volume I.* (Philadelphia: Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), 16.
[14] Bryden, *Reinventing King Arthur*, 31.

view," one that offered mankind a natural place in the universe, suggesting that humans were capable of such traits as heroism and loyalty. This world view involves looking to the past for a broader perspective in judging and understanding the present.[15]

British national identity originates in part from Anglo-Saxonism, or Teutonism. Hugh MacDougall condenses the facets of this myth in *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons*: "From the sixteenth century onwards a conviction had gradually formed in the Englishman's mind that he was particularly manly, honorable, apt for leadership and that his social institutions, of ancient Saxon pedigree, were superior to those of any other people."[16] Edmund Burke, an eighteenth-century political theorist, endorsed the concept of a national identity that is indebted to the citizens of the country's past. In his work *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1791, he argues that everything is "an inheritance from our fore-fathers."[17] In the face of industrialization and change in England, Burke's philosophy was highly appealing, and the myth that he promulgated influenced the elite of the Victorian era. The supposed power and glory of the Anglo-Saxon people reached a peak in this time period, as historians' interpretations of the greatness of Britain, especially as a divine truth from God, invariably assumed racial superiority.[18] This formation of myth, which seeped into all facets of the learned community, including literature, history, art, poetry, and philosophy, helped to construct a culture's values and coordinate a united society. The bond of the British empire, then, was argued to be one that existed along the ties of both blood and religion, and the argument for

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[15] Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 7-9.

[16] Hugh MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal: University of Ottawa Press, 2005).

[17] Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. 2 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864), 33.

[18] MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History*, 97.

expansion was easily made, for if Britain contains the best race of all the world, why shouldn't

the Anglo-Saxon people attempt to expand their empire?

Scholars have argued that national consciousness arises as the result of narratives that can

establish a "national history," in which a community's past and progress is both clarified and

validated.[19] This national history serves a variety of functions in constructing history: by

operating under the assumption that the nation has existed forever, it validates its authenticity; by

giving a nation a specific "place" for its history, it gives it a specific geographical location to feel

connected to; and it highlights heroes from the past in order to suggest a treasured lineage

extending to the inhabitants of the nation existing at the time.[20] John Robert Seeley, a professor

of history at the University of Cambridge published *The Expansion of England* in 1883, which

centered on the justification of British imperialism. The book sold 80,000 copies within two

years and focused on laying out the benefits of empire.[21] The idea behind the book was to

provide the possibilities for a celebrated past, lending itself to a glorious future. Seeley himself

acknowledges this view of history in *The Expansion*:

> It is a favorite maxim of mine that history, while it should be scientific in its method,
> should pursue a practical object. That is, it should not merely gratify the reader's
> curiosity about the past, but modify his view of the present and his forecast of the future.
> Now if this maxim be sound, the history of England ought to end with something that
> might be called a moral.[22]

This same understanding of history, that it offers a lesson of sorts to future citizens, can be

applied to King Arthur stories.

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[19] Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 2.
[20] Ibid., 45-46.
[21] Richard Aldrich, "Imperialism in the Study and Teaching of School History," in *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 27.
[22] John Robert Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: 1883), qtd. in Richard Aldrich, "Imperialism in the Study and Teaching of School History," in *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 27.

What exactly did King Arthur represent to the Victorians? He embodied the ideas of manliness, honor, heroism, leadership, and liberty, all of which played a central role in the understood ideal of Englishness. Even if King Arthur's status as either a historical or a mythical figure was contested, historians in the 1800s generally agreed that Arthur symbolized the foundation of a civilized social order that has only improved with time: "a nation has, in the course of twelve centuries, been formed…inferior to none in every moral and intellectual merit, is superior in every other in the love and possession of useful liberty: a nation which cultivates with equal success the elegances of art, the ingenious labours of industry, the energies of war, the researches of science."[23] King Arthur's Camelot was an example of a group of noble elite caring for and catering to the needs of the poor of the community—conservatives of the nineteenth century could not have asked for a more appropriate medieval model. In fact, Tennyson's *Idylls* ends with a passage entitled, "To the Queen," which deals primarily with laying claim to England's place as an empire, rooting contemporary England within the context of Arthurian legends. "Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes / For ever-broadening England, and her throne / In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle, / That knows not her own greatness…"[24] By creating a picture of a country with "boundless homes," Tennyson compels the reader to consider England's steady, growing, and glorious kingdom. By placing such an image at the end of a work that focuses on a mythical hero story for England, Tennyson draws a connection between England's contemporary, imperial rights and its shining, storybook past.

Closely tied to the idea of medievalism and feudalism was the concept of chivalry. Chivalry encapsulated a variety of ideas, but ultimately it served as a knightly code of conduct:

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[23] Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest, Volume III* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1840), 1.
[24] Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, (London: Edward Moxon and Co., 1859), Reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

"the ideal knight was brave, loyal, true to his word, courteous, generous, and merciful."[25] A

defender of the Church, a brave (yet respectful) warrior, and a participant in pure, courtly love, a

medieval knight embodied the idea of chivalry. Chivalry wavered in and out of popularity with

the people of England throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century, though it

remained intact as an implicit and unspoken code of conduct for gentlemen. Edmund Burke, the

political theorist responsible in part for the medieval revival, lamented the loss of chivalry,

stating:

> The age of chivalry is gone. -- That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has
> succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more, shall we
> behold a generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified
> obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the
> spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, achieved defense of nations, the
> nurse of the manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of
> principle, that chastity of honor, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage
> while it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice
> itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness. . . . [26]

However, what he did not know was that chivalry would make a comeback in the rise of

Victorian medievalism. The ideas of feudalism and chivalry are intimately bound together, and

as interest in medievalism grew, so did the idea of chivalry.

The moral attributes of chivalry are easily evidenced in Tennyson's *Idylls*, particularly in

the oath to which Arthur's knights must swear themselves: "To break the heathen and uphold the

Christ / To ride abroad redressing human wrongs, / to speak no slander, no, nor listen to it / To

honour his own word as if his God's / To lead sweet lives in purest chastity…"[27] However,

Malory's version of King Arthur does not adhere to the same morals that Tennyson's version

possesses. For instance, Malory's Arthur does not show particular interest in his wife,

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[25] Girouard, *The Return to Camelot*, 16.
[26] Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution," 515.
[27] Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, 235-236.

Guenevere, and is more sexually promiscuous than Tennyson's virginal Arthur. In Malory's version, Mordred, Arthur's eventual killer, is actually Arthur's illegitimate son. In Tennyson's version, the two characters are unrelated. Tennyson alters his characters to fit the model for Victorian gentlemen. His work loosely applies Malory's stories to create a symbolic version of Arthurian legend, and his retelling is "Victorian England in costume,"[28] taking the imagery of the past to apply to the ideals of the present. Tennyson's characterization of King Arthur and his knights is only one example of the rewriting of history that occurred in this time period in order to further a model behavior for the people to read and emulate at the time.

Arthur and "The Golden Age of Children's Literature"

The ideas of the medieval revival in the nineteenth century, including the spread of the racial and religious superiority of Britain, the justification for expansion, and the argument for maintaining social and political hierarchy, explains why King Arthur and the Middle Ages were suitable models for Victorian citizens. Views of England's past (based on a mix of history, myth, folklore, and nostalgia), offered a perfect validation for its future successes and pre-eminence. The individual values that the medieval revival advertised, including the code of chivalry, also greatly affected the way in which Victorians were expected to behave. All of these ideas and values were promoted at the same time that children's literature grew more popular, and predictably, the two developments intersected in various ways.

An interest in the study of adolescence began in the early 1800s. Childhood was identified as a category separate from adulthood, and for the first time, childhood came to be understood as a special period of life in which goodness and innocence reigned within a person. Taken together with changes occurring socially and industrially in England, the consciousness of

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[28] Chandler, *A Dream of Order*, 232.

the importance of childhood lent itself to the rise of education for children, as well as the

development of a new genre of literature, aimed specifically at that demographic. This new genre

of children's literature began as a method to teach and instruct children on moral behavior—as

childhood began to be regarded as a period of innocence and incorruptibility, many believed that

this period had to be utilized to teach children the mores of how they should live their lives as

adults.[29] Children's literature in the nineteenth century was aimed at a middle-class audience,

most likely because it was written and developed by members of the middle class and upper

class, who wrote with their own goals and concerns in mind. Even so, members of all classes

read children's literature.[30] In fact, because literacy levels were low among children and the

lower classes in the early nineteenth century, several organizations began circulating reading

material for these audiences to help remedy the inequality of education. This reading material

often fulfilled a moral function, spreading messages of Christianity or British imperialism, which

provided the child reader lessons to learn and behaviors to adopt.[31]

However, the evangelical instructional writings for children were soon disposed in favor

of fictional, imaginative narratives such as fantasy and fairy tales, which became highly popular

in the mid to late nineteenth century. J.S. Bratton notes that the structure of the children's fiction

is important in determining its effectiveness on a child's mind. "[The] romance element in the

stories also had a force independent of the message it is made to carry because it passes into the

realm of fantasy, the enactment of possibilities beyond the restraints of direct experience."[32] The

fantasy element, according to Bratton, allowed children to imagine themselves in otherworld

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[29] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur*, 102.
[30] J.S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1981), 29.
[31] Ibid., 29.
[32] Ibid., 29.

scenarios. The development of children's literature as its own genre, occurring simultaneously with the spread of the medieval revival, came to a head with the introduction of King Arthur stories for children in the nineteenth century. The adaptations focused on encouraging specific individual behaviors, including chivalry, dedication to one's country, respect for authority, bravery, and Christian values. The stories simultaneously pushed the existing medievalist agenda of presenting the glory of the Middle Ages and justified England's contemporary status as an empire, blending the realms of history and myth, with the hope that the children reading the books would be indoctrinated with these ideas by reading them.

To consider Victorian Arthurian adaptations for juvenile audiences, one must first consider the source material for such an adaptation. Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* was not written in a language catering to an adolescent audience, but it is likely that literate people of all ages read it when it first was published in 1485, and young people were familiar with the tales, even if they had not read it themselves.[33] While not accommodated for children, the original version presents several themes of youth and age working in harmony, and many of the stories portray those of knights who advance from young naïveté to worldly knowledge and wisdom as part of knighthood. To them, "noble youth is spent in expectation, training, and hero-worship of knights."[34] They anticipate and look forward to their future, inspired by this form of masculine emulation.

Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, though, did not fully fit Victorian standards. The style of Malory's original text did not quite conform to the idea of grand medieval prose that Tennyson's *Idylls* had so strongly encouraged. As Andrew Lynch argues, its lack of Shakespearean style and

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[33] Andrew Lynch, "*Le Morte Darthur* for Children: Malory's Third Tradition," in *Adapting the Arthurian Legends for Children: Essays on Arthurian Juvenilia (Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures)*, ed. Barbara Tepa Lupack, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 5.
[34] Ibid., 5.

historical romance made it unattractive to modern readers, and ultimately, the lack of

imagination in Malory's work meant that adaptations were necessary in order to illustrate "what

Malory *ought* to have written."[35] Most versions of King Arthur for children during this time are

indeed drawn from Malory's presentation, but are heavily edited, removing storylines of

infidelity or sexual passion and tragic endings for the heroes. The stories served as instructional

tools for children, with a focus on the adventures, challenges, and feats of young, strong-willed

heroes.[36] The stories were particularly targeted toward young men, and they encouraged boys to

develop "masculine" virtues, including strength, loyalty, purity, and bravery. A number of the

Arthurian narratives for children even feature "Boy" in their titles, marking their intended

audiences clearly. Most adaptations for children were not targeted particularly for girls, as the

knightly protagonists of the stories were exclusively male. Nonetheless, girls were encouraged

through the narratives to develop the virtues considered "feminine," including gentleness,

mildness, reserve, and politeness. They were invited to think of the boy knights as their

protectors, taking on limited roles and foreshadowing their adult lives: "boys act, while girls

watch."[37] Though the instructions for children in King Arthur adaptations were strictly gendered,

both girls and boys were "encouraged to act out stories from history or literature, learning to

pattern their own responses after the great men and women of the nation."[38]

What mattered more than the actual plot of the Victorian King Arthur tales was the

characterization of the knights, which the child reader could then accept and attempt to emulate.

In fact, a feature of most Arthurian adaptations, both for children or otherwise, included

simplified characterizations: "the gentle Percival, the patient Gareth, the brave Gawaine, the

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[35] Ibid., 15.
[36] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur*, 111.
[37] Ibid., 110.
[38] Ibid., 104.

peerless Launcelot, the merry Dinadan, the pure knight Galahad. All these strongly contrast the treachery and cowardice of King Mark, and the wickedness of Queen Morgan le Fay."[39] These idealized, simplified constructions strayed significantly from Malory's portrayals of the flawed knights, but Victorian adaptations preferred not to focus on the failings of King Arthur and his followers, instead turning them into glowing representations of how children should want to behave, adding a modern twist to the medieval stories. Tying together ideas of Christianity and youth, Galahad's idealized behavior was a perfect model for Victorian children. Tennyson's Sir Galahad is described as a "bright boy knight," in his tale "The Holy Grail," and his character is catered towards a young audience, in a clear attempt to appeal to boys' imaginations. Sir Galahad was a particularly good model for young readers, as "none in so young youth was ever made a knight / Til Galahad…"[40] Despite his age, Galahad proves himself worthy of knighthood to King Arthur. Galahad's characterization inspired a Victorian model for boys, combining masculine triumphs and the idealistic principles of childlike innocence and vivacity. Tennyson's Galahad "…seems to take his destiny in his own hands, and the course toward that destiny— undertaken with courage, resolve, and energy—seems more important than its goal."[41] He allowed no temptations to distract him from his main objective of completing the quest for the holy Grail, and Tennyson suggests that what makes Galahad such an exemplary knight is that his physical strength and good heart are not dichotomous, but actually essentially intertwined: "My

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[39] Margaret Vere Farrington, *Tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), 8.
[40] Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, 174.
[41] Debra N. Mancoff, "'Pure Hearts and Clean Hands': The Victorian and the Grail," in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira B. Mahoney (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 453.

strength is as the strength of ten / Because my heart is pure."[42] This combination of traits is

compatible with the popular notion of chivalry during this time period.

In Sir James Knowles children's adaptation of the King Arthur stories, entitled *The

Legends of King Arthur and his Knights,* the author writes in his preface that his goal in

publishing the edition is to promote the Arthurian legend. The novel is dedicated to Sir Alfred

Lord Tennyson: "this attempt at a popular version of the Arthurian legends is by his permission

dedicated as a tribute of the sincerest and warmest respect [to Tennyson]."[43] While in large part

an abridgement of Malory's original text, Knowles pays respect to Tennyson's *Idylls* by

including the same values: the glory of the British Empire, the chivalry of Arthur and his knights,

and the promise that King Arthur lives on in England. Knowles's version, unsurprisingly,

portrays Arthur's stories as though they are a part of Britain's history. "King Arthur and his

knights fought, endured, and toiled in the sixth century, when the Saxons were overrunning

Britain; but their achievements were not chronicled by Sir Thomas Malory until late in the

fifteenth century."[44] Still, Knowles admits in the preface that he was the one to create a coherent

story out of all of the existing Arthurian legends, again exemplifying the common combination

of myth and history throughout the nineteenth century.

What makes Knowles's adaptation different is that it caters particularly to children, in an

attempt to make Arthurian legend more accessible to them. It was also one of the first

adaptations of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* for children in the Victorian period. The language is

simplified and most of the bloody battles and tales of passion are removed. Sir Galahad, in his

version as well as Tennyson's, becomes a model for young boys. He is Lancelot's son, a worthy

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[42] Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Sir Galahad," in *Poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1842), 174-178.
[43] Sir James Thomas Knowles, *The Legends of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table. Compiled and Arranged by J.T.K.* 3rd Ed. (London: 1868), 1.
[44] Ibid., 19.

youth who becomes a knight of the Round Table and is described with all of the ideals of

chivalry: "Lancelot, looking on the youth, saw that he was seemly and demure as a dove, with

every feature good and noble, and thought he never beheld a better fashioned man of his

years…'God made of thee as good a man as He hath made thee beautiful.'"[45] He is admired by

all of the other knights for his strength and bravery in spite of his age.

What separates Sir Galahad from the other knights is that he becomes the chosen one to

take on the quest of the Holy Grail. The "Perilous Seat," is a chair in which no one can sit except

the one deemed worthy enough to take on the quest: "this high quest he only shall attain who

hath clean hands and a pure heart, and valour and hardihood beyond all other men."[46] All others

who attempt to sit in the seat immediately perish, and it remains covered until Merlin foretells

the coming of the knight. When he sits in the seat, "…all the knights of the Round Table

marveled at Sir Galahad, and at his tender age, and at his sitting there so surely in the Perilous

Seat."[47] Knowles thus draws a comparison between King Arthur and Sir Galahad, in that they

both have destinies that they willingly and bravely accept. The fact that Galahad is so young and

is yet the one to embark on the most dangerous and admirable adventure of all the knights would

have created a perfect model for young boys; in the name of King Arthur and the Britons, he

serves his duty with gallantry and loyalty, just as boys could aspire to serve England and the

queen. Like Tennyson, Knowles's goal for the story of Sir Galahad is to inspire boys to conduct

themselves with chivalric behavior and possess the will to fight for their country and ruler.

Sidney Lanier's take on a children's version of King Arthur's legend, *The Boy's King

Arthur, Being Sir Thomas Malory's History of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*,

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[45] Ibid., 209.
[46] Ibid., 212.
[47] Ibid., 213.

published in 1881, in many ways displays the same goals as Knowles's version. Although an

American, Lanier claims to write "for many noble and divers boys both of England and

America."[48] He is adamant in his introduction to the book that he has left Malory's work

unchanged, except in providing modernized spellings. He suggests that Malory can be said "to

have written the first English novel"[49] and he offers him most of the credit for the production of

this novel. However, his work, as a book for children, nevertheless follows the Victorian

standards of censorship for Arthurian legends.

One of the most prominent stories in Lanier's work that would have inspired boys is that

of Gareth, the kitchen page who becomes a knight of the Round Table. Gareth comes to King

Arthur and humbly asks Arthur for a year's worth of food and drink, telling him he will ask his

two other questions in a year. Arthur kindly obliges, curious as to why the young man, who

refuses to tell him his name, asks for so little of him, for if he were of noble birth, he assumes he

would have asked for horses and armor and other such goods instead. Sir Kay, mocking the boy,

gives him the temporary name, Beaumains, meaning Fair-hands, and offers him work in the

kitchen at King Arthur's court. Despite the disrespect he faces and the nature of his work as

kitchen boy, Gareth desires so strongly to serve King Arthur that he is willing to carry out the

humble work: "And so he endured all that twelvemonth, and never displeased man nor child, but

always he was meek and mild."[50] When a damsel approaches King Arthur to ask for help on

behalf of her lady (who has been kept captive by the Red Knight), Beaumains, who had just

spent his year working in the kitchen, finally comes forward to ask King Arthur his two

questions: that he be sent on the mission to help the damsel, and that he allow Sir Launcelot to

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[48] Sidney Lanier, *The Boy's King Arthur Being Sir Thomas Malory's History of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), xv.
[49] Ibid., xiv.
[50] Ibid., 72.

make him a knight—to which he agrees. Launcelot knights him, discovering that Beaumains's

name is actually Gareth, and he is actually the brother of Sir Gawaine. The damsel is initially

upset that Arthur offers her no more help than a kitchen hand, but when she sees how aptly he

defeats all of his foes and discovers that he is of noble birth, she realizes how worthy a defender

he is. When he succeeds in saving the lady from the Red Knight, she agrees to marry him and all

of the knights admire his skill, acclaiming that he is "a full noble knight."[51]

 Lanier's presentation of Gareth's tale is a perfect fit for young readers because Gareth is

a paragon of the dutiful child who is rewarded for good behavior. In this story, Gareth is

repeatedly described as a young boy, and respected because of his uncomplaining conduct

despite his age. His tale is one of the lengthier ones of all the knights, and it seems a particularly

appropriate story for instilling ideas of chivalry and patriotism in boys of the Victorian era.

Gareth is patient, respectful of maidens, and meek, yet strong and brave in battle and unafraid to

die on behalf of Arthur and his court: "Damsel…I will not go from you whatsoever ye say, for I

have undertaken of King Arthur for to achieve your adventure, and I shall finish it to the end, or I

shall die hereafter."[52] His example fulfills many of the ideals of Victorian medievalism, as far as

how a young man should behave and the standards to which he should hold himself, regardless

of the type of work he is doing. It certainly fulfills Lanier's goal of creating a narrative for boys

in England and America, inspiring nationalistic ideals and the types of behaviors that should

accompany them.

 Though the majority of Arthurian children's adaptations were written for a young male

audience, not all were targeted toward boys only. *Six Ballads of King Arthur*, a work written for

children in 1881, was published anonymously under the pseudonym, "Your Loving Granny."

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[51] Ibid., 98.
[52] Ibid., 78.

The introduction maintains, like so many other adaptations, that this work is largely drawn from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, but abridged for the enjoyment of the children reading it. Additionally, though the author of the book remains unknown, the implication is that "Granny" is a woman, and nowhere does it say that the work was written specifically for boys—only "children." In this adaptation, the tales focus on King Arthur much more than any other knight, and the obedient child who pulls the sword from the stone does not even desire power—he merely wants to serve his foster father, Sir Ector. "'I am / Beholden so to you, / Command me, and may God me help / I will your bidding do.'"[53] This attitude of respect and deference to elders is a Victorian ideal that applied to both male and female children. The ballads themselves also focus heavily on the women, as well as the men, of Arthurian legends; for instance, in the ballad entitled, "The Marriage of King Arthur," Guenevere's admirable qualities are heralded as Arthur "loved but only her," and Merlin says of her, "For beauty and for fairness too / No maid can her excel."[54] In this way, though the descriptions certainly still fall within the gender norms of the time, and the example is unusual among the majority of the adaptations, *Six Ballads* explicitly appealed to both boys and girls as guides for the behaviors they should emulate.

Teaching History in the Victorian Era

These examples of Arthurian adaptations for children provide only a few of the many instances in which children were encouraged to emulate the characters they read in the stories, as well as admire their way of life. The rising emphasis on children in the nineteenth century did not end with literature. Education also became a central focus: reforms in child labor laws in the mid-nineteenth century kept large numbers of children from spending their youth earning wages

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[53] "Arthur Made King," in *Six Ballads of King Arthur* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1854).
[54] "The Marriage," in *Six Ballads of King Arthur*.

instead of learning.[55] Education became another way of preparing children for adult life and instructing them in different values—namely, the values of Victorian medievalism, including the imperial ideal. Just as King Arthur stories attempted to instill the virtues of chivalry and the connections to England's forefathers, so did elementary school history books of the same time period. In fact, education was considered one of the premiere approaches of molding young minds to accept the glorification of Britain as a nation.[56] Both mediums became tools of propaganda for children in the nineteenth century.

In the early Victorian era, virtually all education, if it occurred at all, occurred in the household. At the turn of the nineteenth century levels of education widely varied, and the status of your family, as well as where your family lived, largely determined how much education you received as a child. A national system of education was instituted in 1870, and when it was, levels of learning varied less widely among children, though still considerably. For instance, even when it was instituted, girls did not often have the opportunity to learn inside the classroom until the early twentieth century.[57] Also, children from wealthy families often attended elite Public Schools, while working-class children attended compulsory elementary schools.[58] At first, the upper classes frowned at the prospect of the lower classes becoming increasingly literate and attending school, but soon education, especially in the light of many changing economic and social conditions in England, came to be seen as an effective means of controlling social norms

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[55] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur*, 106.

[56] J.A. Mangan, introduction to *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 6.

[57] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur*, 106.

[58] Stephen Heathorn, "'Let Us Remember That We, Too, Are English,': Constructions of Citizenship and National Identity in English Elementary School Reading Books, 1880-1914," *Victorian Studies* 38.3 (1995): 398, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3828715.

and maintaining a sense of status quo.[59] This mindset is reflected in the history reading books of elementary schools of the time period.

Imperialism was a key component of education, particularly throughout the late nineteenth century. Imperialism can be defined as "the extension of sovereignty or control, whether direct or indirect, political or economic, by one government, nation, or society over another altogether with the ideas justifying or opposing this process."[60] J.A. Mangan argues that British imperialism and the public school system shared inextricable and close ties to a huge extent in the late nineteenth century, though it can still be seen in public schools today.[61] If imperialism was a major component of learning history during the Victorian era, so was the idea of personal responsibility and duties. Children were guided to learn how they could play their individual parts in maintaining England's status as a great nation.

As previously mentioned, the study of history was only just beginning to be considered its own discipline. In the 1870s, history became its own subject in elementary schools, and it likewise became an important part of the English curricula.[62] In elementary school, teachers used literacy primers, which used the narrative structure of storytelling, to teach history, rather than traditional textbooks. Formal textbooks were only available for instructional use in secondary and elite schools, not elementary schools, until well after the turn of the twentieth century.[63] The ideas of imperialism permeated these history primers, similar to the lessons that infused King Arthur stories presented to children. Each taught that Britain, as an empire, was tied together

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[59] Kimberley Reynolds, *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 9.
[60] George Nadel and Perry Curtis, *Imperialism and Colonialism* (London: MacMillan, 1966), vii.
[61] Mangan, introduction to *Benefits Bestowed?*, 6.
[62] Richard Aldrich, "Imperialism in the Study and Teaching of School History," in *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 24.
[63] Heathorn, "'Let Us Remember That We, Too, Are English,'" 398.

past, present, and future, and that this empire was justified through the nation's heroes throughout history.

Cassell's Historical Course for Schools and the First Historical Reader for Standard II: English History, Roman and Saxon Period provide examples of using history education as a means of fostering social, national, and imperial identities in children. "The reason we like to read English history is because it tells the story of our own ancestors. You all know of your fathers and your grandfathers, and you must remember that each of them had grandfathers and great-grandfathers before him, and so on backwards as far as we can go; so that forefathers of every English child who reads this little book must have been living at every time in the history of the English people."[64] This excerpt neatly summarizes the goals of both Arthurian children's stories and history education in the Victorian period: the history of England is the history of every child. Learning about King Arthur and his knights or the founding of the nation becomes, to children, a similar experience as to studying his or her family tree. In this way, the history primers attempted to weave together a national, ethnic narrative of which every child could be a part. After all, "history education can emphasize collective myths and social practices that constitute a particular identity" and "history education can justify specific forms of intergroup relations and social hierarchies, by depicting the history of relations between different social groups."[65] Specific stories from England's history were undoubtedly used for this very purpose, fitting the ideas of Victorian medievalism.

"Race," although an ambiguous concept, was used to praise the English founding races over all others in many British history primers. "In the hearts of these uncultured sons of the

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[64] Cassell's Historical Readers, 3 Vol. (London: Cassell and Co., 1884), 9.
[65] K.V. Korostelina, History Education in the Formation of Social Identity: Toward a Culture of Peace (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 42.

German soil noble qualities of character and disposition unknown to the world of imperial Rome;

--an earnestness of feeling, a love of independence, a fidelity to engagements, and a natural sense

of honour, all of which fitted them to be the progenitors of a nation of law-abiding Englishmen,

self-respecting, self-governed, and delighting in an ordered freedom."[66] Another example linking

together present pride with the imperial past can be seen in George T. Warner's *A Brief Survey of*

British History (1899):

> When we look at a map of the world, and see how wide is the red that marks the British empire, we may well feel proud…Our race possess the colonial spirit which French, Germans, and Spaniards do not possess: the daring that takes men into distant lands, the doggedness that keeps them steadfast in want and difficulties, the masterful spirit that gives them the power over Eastern races, the sense of justice that saves them from abusing this power and attaches those they rule with so…strong an attachment.[67]

The language employed in Warner's history primer in many ways harkens back to adaptations of

King Arthur stories. Farrington's *Tales of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*

claims that while the actual medieval knights may not exist in contemporary society, their heirs

live on and the "Teutonic race" continues to inspire and instruct: "…the spirit of the ideal knight

lives, and in our gentlemen we see so richly blended that keen sense of honor, generosity,

courtesy, and Christian tenderness and helpfulness, the same influences that developed and

molded *The Knights of Old.*"[68] The idealization in the descriptions of British men, reference to

their exotic adventures and missions, and the superiority of the British over all other races can

indeed be seen in both mediums. In this way, historical textbooks often held that "race" showed

common connection to the idea of a national "character."

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[66] Charlotte Mary Yonge, *English History Reading Books. [With] the Young Student's English History Reading Book [and] English History Home Lesson Books* (London: National Society's Depository, 1881), 22.

[67] George T. Warner, *A Brief History of British History* (London: Blackie and Son, Ltd., 1899), 248-249.

[68] Farrington, *Tales of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*, 13.

Curriculum for boys and girls, after the 1870 Education Act, differed in the elementary school system. Girls spent much of their time in elementary school learning the skills that would be required of them when they reached adulthood and fulfilled their domestic duties: cleaning and sewing, for example. In the late nineteenth century, textbooks often portrayed the different behaviors expected of boys and girls:

> Elder sisters, you may work
>
> Work and help your mothers
>
> Darn the stockings, mend the shirts,
>
> Father's things, and brothers'.
>
> Younger boys, and you may work,
>
> If you are but willing
>
> Thro' the week in many ways
>
> You may earn your shilling.[69]

This portrayal of the roles of girls and boys in education parallels the lessons learned in most Arthurian adaptations for children. The tale of Elaine and Lancelot, as presented in Knowles's *The Legend of King Arthur and His Knights* serves as an example. Elaine swears her love to him even though he has not promised the same, and when he is wounded in a tourney, she takes care of him, "So Elaine daily and nightly tending him, within a month he felt so strong he deemed himself full cured."[70] In this way, Elaine fulfills her womanly duty of caretaker. Just as a young maiden should wait patiently and support her brave knight, and a brave knight work and fight

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[69] *Jarrolds' New Code Reading Books* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1871), 59, quoted in Annmarie Turnbull, "Learning Her Womanly Work: The Elementary School Curriculum," in *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850-1950*, ed. Felicity Hunt (Oxfordshire: B.Blackwell, 1987), 85.

[70] Knowles, *The Legend of King Arthur and His Knights*, 262.

tirelessly for her, so should a young Victorian woman provide her domestic care and a young Victorian man work for his living. Both provide models for children's behavior in order to be instructional tools for their adult lives.

Children, both male and female, were taught to be willing to give up their lives, if needed, for the common good of their country. In Charlotte M. Yonge's *English History Reading Books* (1881), Yonge describes what the home life of their English ancestors consisted of: "Amid all the willfulness and savagery of these ancestors of ours, we read of much that reminds us of the sanctity attaching to the idea of the modern English 'home.' The children reverenced their parents, were ever ready to serve them, and even to die for them if occasion so required."[71] The author of the historical reader creatively sneaks in models of behavior for children by creating the idea that children today should be just as willing to be obedient to their parents as their ancestors were. Compared to the portrayals of Gareth obediently waiting to be knighted, Arthur desiring to follow the wishes of his father, and Galahad taking on the daring quest for the Holy Grail on behalf of his king and country, the lesson of servitude has several recurrences in both the format of history lesson book and Arthurian children's story.

Youth organizations also sprang up in elementary schools as a way for children to become more involved in the patriotic cause of imperialism. Among these organizations was the Lads' Drill Association, established in 1899, which promoted basic military training for boys.[72] However, countless others sprang up with similar purposes, including the Church Lads' Brigade and the Jewish Lads' Brigade, which had similar missions but also attached religious responsibilities. However, perhaps the most enduring of these organizations was the Boy Scouts,

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[71] Yonge, *English History Reading Books*, 22.
[72] Pamela Horn, "English elementary education and the growth of the imperial ideal: 1880-1914," in *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism*, ed. J.A. Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 47.

begun in 1900 by Robert Baden-Powell. These organizations also relied not only on history textbooks but also on the legends of King Arthur to encourage imperial values in the minds of its members. Powell himself called his scouts, "Young Knights of the Empire," and the handbook for the organization used chivalric heroes, King Arthur included, to demonstrate the ideal behaviors for young boys.[73] "Perhaps you wonder what is a Young Knight of the Empire…a gallant fellow…ready to risk his life in doing his duty according to the code or law of Chivalry. Well, nowadays there are thousands of boys all over the British Empire carrying out the same idea, and making themselves into fine, reliable men, ready to take the place of those who have gone away to fight…"[74] Baden-Powell continues, in his handbook, to provide examples throughout British history of "loyalty," "usefulness," "obedience," etc., thus combining lessons of history and legend to forward the cause of patriotism.

History books in elementary schools frequently mentioned King Arthur in their pages, though some referred to him as part of legend and others discussed him as part of the definitive history—again lending Arthurian legend to flexible historicity during the time period. For instance, in Archibald Dick's *First Historical Reader*, he mentions that the poor Britons fought long and hard against their invaders, including the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, and specifically mentions King Arthur's difficulties in keeping the invaders back:

> One of these was a king or chief in the south near Cornwall and Devon. His name was King Arthur. He, and a brave number of brave men, called knights, fought hard against the Saxons. They were all so brave and so good, as story books say, that the king could not make one higher than the other; and so, when they came to feast with him, he made them sit at a round table, for then no one could be nearer the head of the table than any other.[75]

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[73] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur*, 126.

[74] Robert Baden-Powell, *Young Knights of the Empire: Their Code and Further Scout Yarns* (1917), 1-2.

[75] Archibald Dick, *First Historical Reader for Standard II*, ed. T. Morrison (London: Gall and Inglis, 1881), 17.

The description of King Arthur and his knights as "brave and good" is particularly fitting with

King Arthur children's stories from the same time, in the idealized characterization and the

suffering they endured for the betterment of their own country. Another example of King Arthur

in historical readers can be seen in Yonge's version, which places King Arthur within a religious

context: "The famous legend of King Arthur, the last hero of the Britons in their resistance to the

English, represents him as fighting at the head of a Christian knighthood and Christian soldiery,

against the *heathen* invader."[76] This presentation coincides with the idea of Arthur as a protector

of Christianity, again seen in several children's adaptations.

The structure of the history primers and of Arthurian children's literature are paralleled in

that they both strive to serve as instructional tools of social norms and simplify stories in order to

make them suitable for young readers, with the end goal of creating a unified nation and society

where the elite and the masses were bound together. Both also emphasize the value of heroic

"forefathers," who display the qualities of good citizenship and patriotism.

Conclusion

The general cultural attitude toward King Arthur in the nineteenth century can be neatly

summarized by Winston Churchill: "None the less, to have established a basis in fact for the

story of Arthur is a service which should be respected. In this account we prefer to believe that

the story with which Geoffrey delighted the fiction-loving Europe of the twelfth century is not all

fancy. It is all true or it ought to be; and more and better besides."[77] Considering that Churchill

was a schoolboy in the 1880s, a peak period for the presence of Victorian medievalism, his

attitude toward the subject of King Arthur is not surprising. Churchill would have been

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[76] Yonge, *English History Reading Books*, 21.
[77] Sir Winston Churchill, *A History of the English Speaking Peoples*, Vol. 1. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958), 60.

instructed in the nationalistic values of history primers, and may have been familiar with King Arthur stories for children when he was a child. As he explains, the history of King Arthur as it has been told throughout the centuries may not have existed in actuality, but more important is the fact that regardless of whether or not it existed, it contributed immensely to the recognized history of the Victorian era, and is a valued and respected aspect of the nation's identity.

The revival of King Arthur stories in the Victorian era was a result of a general interest in medievalism, and King Arthur was "the beautiful incarnation of all the best characteristics of our nation."[78] This interest manifested itself in children's literature, as well, as it was believed that children had to be taught virtues at a young age. The highly edited Arthurian narratives cultivated a sense of nationalism, citizenship, and identity in children, which was paralleled in the history books of elementary schools of the same time period. Both sought to create social, national, and imperial identities in Great Britain's youth in an attempt to solidify a unified nation.

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[78] *Sharpe's London Journal*, 9 (1849), 374, qtd. in Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*, 13.

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