Before You Read

This speech, delivered on May 15, 1903, in Birmingham, England, was part of a Conservative-party tariff-reform campaign. In it Chamberlain speaks out both as an unwavering advocate of the British Empire and as a strong isolationist. Isolationism is the “You stay on your side of the fence, and I’ll stay on mine” belief that one’s country should be kept free of entanglements—such as pacts and alliances—with other nations. As you will see, Chamberlain—who began his political life as a radical liberal but later became extremely conservative—felt that the British Empire should be self-reliant and should look to its own colonies—and not to foreign allies—for economic and military reinforcement. Above all, Chamberlain’s speech challenges Britain’s support of free trade—the tax-free exchange of goods between nations—in favor of a policy that would levy new taxes against nations outside the British Empire but would largely exempt the British colonies from those selfsame tariffs. In this way, Chamberlain reasoned, the colonies would become ever more firmly attached to—and therefore dependent on—the mother country, Great Britain.

Chamberlain’s speech is a call to action, and as such it includes a full arsenal of persuasive techniques, from rhetorical questions to emotional appeals. As you read, be alert to the emotionally loaded words he uses to describe the British Empire and its “self-governing colonies.” How does Chamberlain use appeals to “Imperial patriotism” to convince his listeners that the British Empire must be maintained at all costs? How must his British audience have felt as they listened to this speech? As he opens, Chamberlain is referring to his political enemies, the Liberals who oppose tariff reform.

“I Believe in a British Empire”

Joseph Chamberlain

I cannot look forward without dread to handing over the security and existence of this great Empire to the hands of those who have made common cause with its enemies, who have charged their own countrymen with methods of barbarism, and who apparently have been untouched by that pervading1 sentiment which I found everywhere where the British flag floats, and which has done so much in recent years to draw us together. I should not require to go to South Africa in order to be convinced that this feeling has obtained2 deep hold on the minds and hearts of our children beyond the seas. It has had a hard life of it, this feeling of Imperial patriotism. It was checked for a generation by the apathy3 and the indifference which were the characteristics of our former relations with our Colonies, but it was never extinguished. The embers were still alight, and when in the late war4 this old country of ours showed that it was still possessed by the spirit of our ancestors, and that it was still prepared to count no sacrifice that was necessary in order to maintain the honor and the interests of the Empire, then you found a response from your children across the seas that astonished the whole world by a proof, an undeniable proof, of affection and regard.

Is it to end there? Are we to sink back into the old policy of selfish isolation which went very far to dry and even to sap the loyalty of our colonial brethren? I do not think so. I think these larger issues touch the people of this country. I think they have awakened to the enormous importance of a creative time like the present, and of taking advantage of the opportunities offered in order to make permanent what has begun so well. Remember, we are a kingdom, an old country. We proceed here on settled lines. We have our quarrels and our disputes, and we pass legislation which may be good or bad; but we know that, whatever changes there may be, at all events the main stream will ultimately reach its appointed destination. That is the result of centuries of constitutional progress and freedom.

But the Empire is not old. The Empire is new—the Empire is in its infancy. Now is the time when we can mold that Empire and when we and those who live with us can decide its future destinies. Just let us consider what that Empire is; I am not going tonight to speak of those hundreds of millions of our Indian and native fellow subjects for whom we have become responsible. I consider for the moment only our relations to that white British population that constitutes the majority in the great self-governing colonies of the Empire. Here in the United Kingdom there are some forty millions of us. Outside there are ten millions of men either directly descended from ancestors who left this country or more probably men who themselves in their youth left this country in order to find their fortunes in our possessions abroad. How long do you suppose that this proportion of population is going to endure? The development of those colonies has been delayed by many reasons—but mainly probably by a more material reason—by the fact that the United States of America has offered a greater attraction to British emigration.

But that has changed. The United States, with all their vast territory, are filling up; and even now we hear of tens of thousands of emigrants leaving the United States in order to take up the fresh and rich lands of our colony in Canada. It seems to me not at all an impossible assumption that before the end of this present century we may find our fellow subjects beyond the seas as numerous as we are at home. I want you to look forward. I want you to consider the infinite importance of this not only to yourselves but to your descendants. Now is the time when you can exert influence. Do you wish that if these ten millions become forty millions they shall still be closely, intimately, affectionately united to you, or do you contemplate the possibility of their being separated, going off each in his own direction, under a separate flag? Think what it means to your power and influence as a country; think what it means to your position among the nations of the world; think what it means to your trade and commerce—I put that last.

What is the meaning of an Empire? What does it mean to us? We have had a little experience. We have had a war, a war in which the majority of our children abroad had no apparent direct interest. We had no hold over them of any kind, and yet at one time during this war, by the voluntary decision of these people, at least 50,000 Colonial soldiers were standing shoulder to shoulder with British troops, displaying a gallantry equal to their own and the keenest intelligence. It is something for a beginning, and if this country were in danger, I mean if we were, as our forefathers were, face to face some day—Heaven forfend5—with some great coalition of hostile nations, when we had with our backs to the wall to struggle for our very lives, it is my firm conviction there is nothing within the power of these self-governing colonies they would not do to come to our aid. I believe their whole resources in men and in money would be at the disposal of the Mother Country in such an event. That is something—something which it is wonderful to have achieved, and which it is worth almost any sacrifice to maintain.

I believe in a British Empire, in an Empire which, though it should be its first duty to cultivate friendship with all the nations of the world, should yet, even if alone, be self-sustaining and self-sufficient, able to maintain itself against the competition of all its rivals. And I do not believe in a Little England which shall be separated from all those to whom it would in the natural course look for support and affection, a Little England which would then be dependent absolutely on the mercy of those who envy its present prosperity, and who have shown they are ready to do all in their power to prevent its future union with the British races throughout the world.

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Before You Read

As a member of the Indian Congress movement, Jawaharlal Nehru worked for Indian independence from Great Britain for twenty-eight years before he saw it become a reality, in 1947. In that year, Nehru was elected the first prime minister of the newly independent nation. He held that office until his death, in 1964.

A close friend and colleague of the great Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi, Nehru was renowned for his efforts to establish a democratic government in India. He also sought to raise the standard of living for Indians, even while opposing alliances with powerful nations and adopting a policy of nonagression.

The speech you are about to read was given by Nehru on the eve of Indian independence—August 14, 1947—to the members of the Indian Parliament.

“The Noble Mansion of Free India”

Jawaharlal Nehru

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Long years ago we made a tryst1 with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?

Freedom and power bring responsibility. The responsibility rests upon this Assembly,2 a sovereign body representing the sovereign people of India. Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labor and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now. Nevertheless, the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.

That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant3 striving so that we may fulfill the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation4 has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

And so we have to labor and to work, and work hard, to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart. Peace has been said to be indivisible;5 so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments. To the people of India, whose representatives we are, we make an appeal to join us with faith and confidence in this great adventure. This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.

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