

13 Exotic Bodies and Mundane Medicines: AAdvertising and eEmpire in the HLate-Victorian and Edwardian pPress¹

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Wherever we look, we see the same thing. Advertising is universal, and must necessarily be so. It has always existed; but it is only in the last decades of the present century that it is being systematized and treated in an intelligent fashion; [...] press advertising [...] reaches the consumer in the spot where he is most susceptible – his home. No other form of advertising has such opportunities of penetrating into the very sanctum sanctorum of the consumer.

William Stead Junior, *The Art of Advertising* (1899).²

By the end of the Victorian period, readership of newspapers had increased significantly because of the onset of mass literacy. Given that newspapers made considerable profit from advertising, and advertisers made ever-increasing use of newspapers to promote their products, it is little surprise that general scholarship identifies this period as a key juncture in histories of consumerism.³ The removal of stamp duty in 1855 led to a surge in publication of new periodicals, and was a vital moment not only in publishing history in general but also for the significance of the press to shape public opinion.⁴ However, it was not until the final decades of the century that – in a context of increased disposable income and the active targeting of consumers of all social classes – advertisers fully manipulated the potential of newspapers to promote their products in the very heart of the Victorian home.⁵ In terms of business history, this period was pivotal: the 1880s witnessed the expansion of advertising agencies, and specialist manuals dedicated to the art of advertising and marketing proliferated.⁶ Pictorial advertising benefited from technological developments that drove down the production costs of newspapers, increased the speed of their production, and – crucially for studies into visual

culture – increased their scope to incorporate intricate visual material.⁷ As Anandi Ramamurthy argues, in discussion of the impact of race on advertising, the ‘power of advertising lies not simply in its quantity, but also in its use of the latest technology to bamboozle us with brilliant images.’⁸ The final two decades of the nineteenth century are additionally characterized by the attempt to impose imperial propaganda on multiple forms of popular print and visual culture. It seems logical, therefore, that some of the most detailed investigations into late-Victorian and Edwardian advertising situates research within the context of debates about the influence of racial and imperial ideologies on consumer culture. This essay examines illustrated advertising to revisit precisely that debate; that is, what can the study of advertising suggest about the extent to which imperialism left an imprint on British popular and visual culture? Does the widespread use of militaristic and what we now consider racist adverts – both at the time and subsequently in academic study and museum (online or otherwise) exhibitions – illustrate that empire had reached into the ‘very sanctum sanctorum’ of the late-Victorian home? Most studies, outlined below, argue that advertisers did indeed use visual iconography to exploit popular imperialism – not only to make their products more appealing to Victorian consumers but, in doing so, to extol their companies’ own patriotic credentials. However, scrutiny of a range of newspapers over the course of the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s (the period of peak propaganda) reveals that the genus of press advert that might be called *explicitly* imperial was not as commonplace as might be expected. In his recent book, *Empire of Things* (2015), Frank Trentmann observes a similar trend: ~~—that~~ although late-Victorian imperialism was the crucial period for creation of the citizen-consumer, adverts tended to focus less on the colonial than anticipated. He writes that although ‘In the era of ‘new imperialism’ in the 1880s—~~—~~1890s, imperial symbols and slogans gained grounds in advertising ... what is noteworthy is not that racial images appear but that they do so far less than we expect.’⁹ Trentmann is correct; explicitly imperial adverts feature intermittently rather than consistently. This is not, however, to argue that advertisers did not seek to exploit empire

in their promotional materials – they did, and when they did the evidence of the imagery is unequivocal – but that we need to be more alert to why these adverts appeared in some moments and not others.

Below, I sketch out of the significance of thinking about topicality: advertisers clearly responded to the news and sought to position their products in relation to current affairs. When imperial themes dominated the news, adverts followed; when empire was not front-page news, other factors influenced marketing techniques. This line of analysis does not necessarily undermine the argument that explicit imperial discourses shaped advertising practice in key moments of time (as will be shown); rather, it is to suggest that we need to be more alert to how implicit manifestations of imperial ideology affected advertising content. Indeed, closer scrutiny of products that extolled the health and nutritional qualities of mundane medicines and everyday consumables may also be indicative of an imperial culture, albeit a discourse of domestic imperialism significantly less overt than one that one that traded on clear visual demarcations of race and the newsworthiness of military conflict. Adverts for cough medicine, tonics, soap, and meat extracts might not have depicted empire as an explicit selling point (though some did), but – when placed within a wider context of discourses of race, nation, and empire, and especially concern about the future of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ – suggest other ways in which the domestic traces of an imperial ideology shaped patterns of product promotion. In short, the imperial – at times explicit, but often less obvious – can also be detected in the quotidian.

The Victorian period was dominated by the visual – a ‘universal language’ of seeing and understanding the world, in Lynda Nead’s neat formulation, in which advertising became ‘part of the visual fabric’ of everyday life.¹⁰ Where there was a public gaze, adverts dominated the eyeline: billboards, hoardings, transportation, leisure venues, the exteriors of buildings, to name but a few. As in the public space of the street, so too in the privacy of the home. In the

place of streams of classified texts, technological developments by the end of the century made possible the dominance and creativity of image making – font, picture, iconography – which, in turn, allowed advertisers to appeal to the immediacy of the first glimpse. ‘A well laid out advertisement’, according to the *Advertisers’ Guide to Publicity* (1887), ‘frequently creates want, as well as tells people where such can be supplied.’¹¹ ‘Pictorial advertising’, according to Stead Junior:

is the most effective form of advertisement. A picture appeals to all classes of the community whether educated or uneducated. Anyone can understand a picture. A man may not be able to read his ABC but he can recognise the meaning of a picture as soon as his eye sees it.¹²

Advertisers made use of techniques used by the press to incorporate more intricate imagery. The author of *Successful Advertising* identified the trend towards the dominance of the visual in 1878: ‘Anyone who has followed the developments in advertisements will be struck by the immense increase in the number of illustrated advertisements. Not long ago whole page advertisements consisted nine tenths of type matter only. Now it is the other way.’¹³ This was the period of the mass circulation of the illustrated press – the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*, catering for those who could afford 6 pence an issue, were followed by the penny and half penny *Penny Illustrated Paper* and *Daily Mail* (from 1896) for those who couldn’t, all of which recorded huge advertising revenues. Stead Junior documents that by 1900, money spent on advertising in London alone equated to millions, approximately 9 shillings per year, per citizen; or more ‘than was spent on the campaign which destroyed the power of the Khalifa’ in 1898, or ‘the total public expenditure of Ceylon or Natal.’¹⁴ In the final decades of the nineteenth century, newspaper advertising was big business and the use of images were core to that process.

It was surely no accident that Stead Junior, writing in 1899, drew a contrast between the cost of advertising and the costs of (recent front-page) colonial warfare and colonial administration in

Asia and Africa. The last two decades of the nineteenth century were not just significant in terms of media history, they were also a period of intense imperial propaganda. A series of studies have demonstrated that imperialism featured heavily in Victorian print and visual culture; this included 'official' sites such as school textbooks and the ~~carefully-manufactured~~ [carefully manufactured](#) use of the image of Victoria herself, as well as the increasingly profitable commercial fields of juvenile literature, the commodification of celebrities, and performance culture.¹⁵ If the Porter-MacKenzie debate about the extent of the reach of such propagandistic intentions into public consciousness is yet fully to be resolved, nonetheless the evidence from previous scholarly research into the relationship between race, empire, and advertising, seems to support MacKenzie's interpretation; not only that imperialism was a core ingredient of late-Victorian and Edwardian public and private life, but that the public was broadly susceptible to imperial propaganda.¹⁶ Important books by Anandi Ramamurthy (*Imperial Persuaders*), Thomas Richards (*Commodity Culture of Victorian England*), and Anne McClintock (*Imperial Leather*) all testify to a prevailing influence of racial and imperial ideology on companies and their marketing strategies.¹⁷ Printed anthologies of Victorian advertising tend to substantiate such conclusions – the most immediately obvious is Robert Opie's *Rule Britannia: Trading on the British Image* (1985).¹⁸ These books, collating explicitly imperial images, draw our attention to how adverts and product packaging recycled and reaffirmed symbols of imperial conquest – racial bodies, exotic animals, military prowess, technological superiority, domestication of wild landscapes – in their attempts to promote soft consumer commodities such as tea, chocolate, cigarettes, and soap. These accounts argue companies sought commercially to exploit imperial tropes to make their product more desirable to potential consumers; the inference is that these explicitly imperial adverts indicate a popular acceptance of, and perhaps even enthusiasm for, empire. Moreover, the argument that late-Victorian advertising was dominated by racist and colonial imagery persists because of the prevalence of such advertising in museum exhibitions and in online repositories.¹⁹

The narrative of the chronological commingling of mass media, mass consumerism, and imperial ideology is seductive. When present, imperialist iconography is unambiguous. In a notorious Pears soap advert, a black child is washed and, in the process, becomes civilized (more comment below). Tea adverts, with the backdrop of Indian elephants, women in indigenous costume, and semi-naked male plantation workers, position British settlers and dignitaries at the forefront of the image.²⁰ A cigarette is reshaped to depict a Gatlin gun. A smorgasbord of products, from edibles such as biscuits, cocoa, and baking powder through to relative luxuries – watches, hearth rugs, camping equipment – are endorsed by the recommendation of imperial heroes. Henry Morton Stanley, the explorer, is used to sell bootlaces, jewellery and cough remedies (and a whole lot more) upon his return from the Emin Pasha relief expedition in 1890.²¹ Kitchener's face is emblazoned across adverts for cigarettes, razors and whiskey following his military success defeating the Khalifa at Omdurman (1898).²² His iconic moustache made many products manlier (and this was *before* that First World War recruitment poster).²³ Villains are defeated, their 'only solace' ~~---~~ in the words of one advert – their access to British commodities, ~~symbolising-symbolizing~~ the global exportation of British manufactures as central to the imperial mission.²⁴

Defining what a visual manifestation of the 'imperial' might look like, however, is not such a straightforward task. Indeed, central to the dispute between Porter and MacKenzie is the methodological question of what, precisely, constitutes evidence. For Porter, historians have fallen into the trap of knowing their arguments before they know their archive; his refrain, that 'it will not simply do to look for 'imperial' evidence without being aware of what lies around it',²⁵ is valuable in the context of the study of pictorial advertising. Porter's observation is particularly relevant here since studies into advertising and imperialism tend to highlight and analyse those sources that take as a start point imperial content. Porter ~~recognises-recognizes~~ that, from the 1880s, 'the empire appeared in advertisements' at a frequency and 'intensity'

that was new. This is certainly the case: opportunities afforded by technological improvements to printing images gave advertisers more scope to illustrate the exotic. Nonetheless, Porter reduces such imagery to 'trivia' and his two sentences on the topic do not sufficiently address an issue that might otherwise have partially substantiated his argument.²⁶ Adverts with no immediately obvious link to the empire vastly outnumbered those that thumped the jingo drum. I have used three broad indicators to determine explicitly 'imperial': the use of stereotypes in racial iconography suggestive of white superiority; celebratory representation of the British abroad as explorers and members of the armed forces, centred not only on the hero figure of the leader but the ordinary Tommy; and, the visual appropriation of the flora and fauna of colonial places to show British control over territory and raw material as well as people. Studying the illustrated press from between 1882 and 1902 confirms that adverts were responsive to current affairs; trading on the ideology of imperialism and the image of the empire at key moments in which the empire was at the forefront of the news agenda. The key point to emphasize is that empire featured explicitly in advertisements when empire dominated headlines. Analysis of some of the most frequently seen adverts confirms their contemporaneity. Illustrated papers carried adverts in which stereotypes of Africans, as either primitive and childlike or barbaric and therefore requiring the civilising touch of Europeans, were used as visual shorthand for the promotion of British goods. In December, 1884, one of the most famous and retrospectively controversial of Victorian advertisements (use an internet image search for Victorian racism and advertising) was first published in the *Graphic*: a Pears soap advert presented a scene in which a black ~~child is~~ washed ~~himself~~ white. This image, analysed in depth in several key studies,²⁷ reveals much about racial attitudes. Not only is cleanliness and ~~civilisation~~-civilization associated with whiteness, but the black child is depicted as subject to the white child's influence. When clean, the black boy examines his complexion and is happy, his contentment the result of the white child's intervention. The advert was published while the Berlin Conference was ongoing. At this conference, European

powers, previously engaged in competition with one another over African territory and raw materials, agreed effectively to partition the continent. The advert is an explicit topical reference to imperial policy, reifying racial attitudes to the 'Dark Continent', and confirming the product as a symbol of a civilising mission. The image, as Ramamurthy informs, formed the template of an advertising trope repeated in press and others forms of advertising for over two decades.²⁸ As indicated in Ramamurthy's analysis of newspapers, the trope of 'washing black white' was adopted by multiple companies including Vinolia, Cooks, and Sunlight.²⁹ Later in the 1880s, British colonial wars in Egypt and the Sudan set a context for even more explicit references to race. A Pears Soap advert (Figure 13.1) – 'The Formula of British Conquest' – found in the *ILN* (27 August 1887), the *Graphic* (30 July 1887), as well as other papers on multiple occasions across several weeks, depicts 'dervishes', appearing animalistic, looking at a rock structure on which is embossed 'PEARS SOAP IS THE BEST.' This image is reproduced in Ramamurthy and McClintock, and an adapted version of it from 1890 is found in Richards.³⁰ Following Ramamurthy's observations, this advert depicts several explicitly imperial themes: the product appeals to the Christian justification of imperial expansion – Africans are presented as defeated savages who have laid down their weapons, now reminiscent of biblical shepherds bowing not to the Angel Gabriel but to the supremacy of the white British product.

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The landscape situates the product as dominating over alien terrain, bringing light to space that might otherwise be empty but for the dark presence of African skin. Newspaper readers will have recalled the death of General Gordon, in 1885, at the hands of the Mahdists, and recalled also the fierce religious rhetoric of a war of Christian civilization pitched against African barbarism. The text information at the bottom, quoting a war correspondent, confirms that Pears extended as far as the British army but, unlike the military, not only endured where Gordon had failed but exerted influence:

Even if our invasion of the Soudan has done nothing else it has at any rate left the Arab something to puzzle his fuzzy head over, for the legend PEARS SOAP IS THE BEST, inscribed in high white characters on the rock marks the farthest point of our advance.²

Clearly the advert manipulated the image of the racial body to situate the product within an imperial discourse. If the 1884 advert showed Pears washing black skin white, here it was sanitising a continent. However, as will be shown later, discourses of cleanliness and hygiene need not always refer to differences in the colour of the skin of human subjects.

Moreover, advertisers exploited the topicality of warfare as front-page news. Richard Fulton's excellent study of Kitchener and the 'Sudan Sensation' of 1898 (Stead Junior's defeating the Khalifa moment) powerfully argues that, in the context of a media-driven obsession with the east African campaigns, advertising formed a vibrant part of a visual broadcast culture.

Companies helped sustain enthusiasm for war and, in doing so, positioned themselves as central to heroization of Kitchener and the commercial exploitation of his image.³¹ At the time of the second Boer War, advertisers positioned their products as central to all aspects of the war effort.³² As the British public demanded instantaneous news,³³ Bovril was keen to use its adverts to *tell* the news as well as react to it. Bovril was 'liquid' life that provided comfort to wounded soldiers and its logo was frequently emblazoned on images of field hospitals in adverts.³⁴ This was important in a context of news returning home of poor conditions and military retreats – more on this below. Its nutritional qualities were used to endorse its central role in sustaining the British military effort. At the time of the Relief of Mafeking a whole page spread in the *Daily Mail* (24 September 1900) – citing testimonies from 'doctors, nurses, officers, soldiers, and newspaper correspondents' (including the household names of Baden-Powell and Kipling) – extolled Bovril's virtues and its 'part in the South African War.' The advert mimics the layout of news pages and editorial; the advert *is* the news. In other advert styles, small display ads were used but nonetheless the message was immediate and effective:

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in once instance of many, when reservists were being called to the front in October 1899, Bovril declared itself to be ‘an unfailing reserve force’ (*Daily Mail*, 21 October 1899). In March 1900, the letters that spelled out BOVRIL were embossed on a map of South Africa showing it was an essential ingredient in Lord Roberts’ march across the country to relieve besieged British troops at Kimberley. The text of the advert reads: ‘This extraordinary coincidence is one more proof of the universality of Bovril, which has already figured so conspicuously throughout the South African campaign’ (*Illustrated London News*, 28 March 1900). It was no extraordinary coincidence that Bovril should adopt such a tactic. The advert was a clever piece of graphic trickery entirely consistent with a product that had positioned itself as an essential ingredient in improving and sustaining British military fortunes. Patriotism sold.

Bovril was not alone in seeking to make gain by aligning itself with up to the minute news. An advert for Pioneer tobacco published in the *ILN* on 3 March 1900 depicted John Bull, carton of cigarettes in one hand and union flag in the other, in debate with Paul Kruger (the Boer leader). John Bull declares: ‘I’m here and civilisation is coming so you’d better come to terms’ – clearly a play on the week’s news about how the Ladysmith siege had been relieved and that the Boers were seeking dialogue. Ogden’s cigarettes ran a series of adverts in which their product was labelled a ‘comrade’ to men at the front, selling the product as both an ally of troops but also a method for consumers at home also to show solidarity. One example demonstrates the extent to which the company tapped into topical affairs. On 4 January 1901, an advert in the *Daily Mail* – appearing also in the *Illustrated London News* the next day – simply contained a sketch outline of Roberts and read ‘Unbeaten.’ Roberts, established as a war hero not only for leadership in South Africa but previously in Afghanistan and India, had returned to Britain. The press was awash with reports of fanfare and ceremony. The advert clearly sought to exploit the mood of the moment.³⁵

It would be possible to pick out hundreds of other examples of advertising reflecting current affairs, and several scholars – as indicated – do so. These adverts include images of exotic animals, such as in Huntley and Palmer’s biscuits which depict the tiger hunt in northern India (and reconstructing multiple images of the royal tour to India in 1889–1890 that saturated the illustrated press). Examples can easily be found of racial stereotyping demonstrating that advertisers not only used visual technologies to illustrate visual contrast between the British colonizer and the African colonized: for instance, Indians and Chinese were frequently included in images used to sell tea and other exotic products. Moreover, a common trope of the trade carton deposited in wild landscapes appears in many adverts for multiple products: cargo of tea, soap, biscuits, cigarettes, and so on; are seen in a series of locations – in chronological tandem with military adventures or feats of exploration – ranging from the tropical African jungle to the mountainous north of India, from the Persian desert to the Antarctic. The consistent visual message is that products not only advanced into new territory as empire expanded, but that products were part of the civilization of the wild and reinforced white British superiority. Studies that focus on race and colonial advertising tend to hold these up as examples of soap advertising in general. Likewise, studies that investigate advertising at time of war do not have to search too hard to find examples of products positioning themselves as central to the war effort. Following Porter’s critique, it is all too easy – especially in an age of digitized newspapers in which use of specific search terms rapidly speed up the research process making possible direct searches rather than page-by-page reading – to find adverts that unashamedly utilized explicitly imperial themes.

Yet, the question of typicality remains. Of course, the existence of these adverts confirms that companies did exploit imperialism to make their product more appealing to the consumer; they reckoned that spectacular visually arresting images could persuade consumers to choose their brand over another. Soap advertising, albeit in a context of enhanced technologies of visual

iconography, was well placed to reproduce ideologies of racial difference, yet did not commonly resort to racial imagery. Cigarette companies may well, in Mike Dempsey's words, have exploited the fact that 'war offered a heaven-sent opportunity for tobacco manufacturers to produce advertising which would both increase sales and express appropriately patriotic sentiments.'³⁶ However cigarettes, at other times and even in times of war, played mostly on other themes of masculinity. Meat extract products, such as in the case of Bovril, manipulated wartime conditions to emphasize its health and energy-giving properties. But, overall, questions of nutrition and health led to advertisements that played on cost and quality to emphasize value-for-money approaches to raising vigorous children in times of poverty. What other discourses determined the subject of advertising? Here, I want to explore key marketing hooks of 'health' and 'nutrition' since these dominate the context of advertising. It is possible, especially around the context of the Boer War, to identify aspects of social imperialism not fully considered in a literature concerned to analyse spectacular visualizations of empire. Can adverts – not overtly imperial – nonetheless testify to an influence of imperialism on social life?

At the time of the Boer War, Britain was gripped by a panic about public health. A third of volunteer recruits was deemed unfit to serve, a statistic made worse by revelations that volunteers from the smoke cities of the north were suffering from all sorts of physical weaknesses caused by poor nutrition.³⁷ In Manchester, for instance, 8,000 out of 11,000 would-be volunteers were rejected after medical testing.³⁸ News from the front during the first months of war further reinforced a sense of national decline (already at panic levels due to existential threats posed by the rise of Germany as a competitor nation): not only was Britain being heavily defeated by a foe she was expected to easily crush, but British troops were suffering through poor leadership. Of the 22,000 recorded British deaths in ~~south~~ South Africa, less than a third took place on the battlefield. According to Anne Summers, the neglect of soldiers, the overcrowded and inadequately staffed field hospitals, and deaths caused by 'preventable

diseases', served to provoke heated national debate about the nation's and, by extension, empire's, strength.³⁹ If war was a test of national fitness, Britain was obviously failing. It is little surprise that, in such a context, companies like Bovril and Ogdens sought to promote their goods by extolling their contribution to the health and morale of troops. Ogdens, as seen, was a 'comrade.' Bovril was 'liquid life', positioning itself as central – as we have seen – to the war effort. One particular Bovril advert, published in the *ILN* on 24 February and with the widely reported news of significant British fatalities at Spion Kop fresh in the public mind, depicts an injured soldier recovering from injury and sipping Bovril. The text of the advert states that Bovril is 'assisting the recovery of wounded soldiers' by giving 'life to the soldier faint from loss of blood.' Here, in the absence of nurses on the front line, the product stood in for female care. When British military fortunes turned following the relief of the siege at Kimberley, Bovril proudly declared in an advert in the *Daily Mail* (7 March 1900) that it doubled its sales in the calendar year; 'a remarkable result' the text of the advert ran, especially since the company had donated 'large quantities ... to the Government for use in Hospital tents in South Africa.' Clearly, Bovril's alliance with the war effort had reaped financial rewards. In January 1901, around the time of relatively successful British offensives, an advert entitled 'Bovril is in a class by itself', the company boasted that 'Bovril has played such a conspicuous part in South Africa that it forms no inconsiderable feature of the story of the Campaign.' The advert included endorsements from the *Lancet*, the Royal Army Medical Corps, scientists, and physicians, and explained Bovril's vital role 'as nourisher as well as stimulant' (*Daily Mail*, 25 January 1901).

<COMP: Place Figure 13.2 Here>

Bovril's commercial success, by its own definition, owed to its self-positioning as fundamental to the health and strength of the war effort. Figure 13.2, published around the major military success at Mafeking, emphasized the point in a full-page advert: Bovril's qualities are not only endorsed by the household names of Baden-Powell and Kipling, but by unnamed medical

experts, hospitals commissions and the Red Cross. When Britain was not at war, Bovril's health-giving properties remained central to its promotional message. Scanning the pages of newspapers before and after the war – and even during – shows the much greater frequency of adverts not extolling the product's explicit imperial values. Several clear tropes emerge: Bovril was affordable and was for cooking and consuming; thus, adverts emphasized nutritional value in the domestic sphere as well as the field of battle. Images of children, the elderly, and the infirm, made healthy by their consumption of the value-for-money product, are commonplace. Bovril associated itself with physical fitness campaigns – both at the level of debate about policy towards child health – but also seeking endorsements from famous athletes and strongmen.⁴⁰

Emphasis on value, nutrition, and strength is no surprise. Food accounted for a third of working-class expenditure in 1900.⁴¹ Poverty surveys had revealed shocking levels of malnourishment,⁴² a concern exacerbated at the time by those reports of the medical failings of would-be recruits. During the war, Bovril emphasized it was assisting troops in a fight against ill health and inadequate nourishment as well as a fight against the Boer enemy.⁴³ At home, it did likewise. A multitude of adverts urged consumers to buy Bovril, not only for its value for money, but because of its medicinal properties; a stream of adverts declare Bovril waging war on influenza, rickets, hunger, and the cold (see, for instance, the list of medical authorities testifying that Bovril can combat ill health in [Figure 13.2](#)). Beecham's pills, similarly, sought credit for war success. In a full-page advert reflecting on the relieved sieges at Kimberley and Ladysmith, the advert (*Daily Mail*, 13 April 1900) was entitled 'For this Relief, Much Thanks.' The advert's dense text is informative: 'An instructive comparison may be drawn between the power and vitality of an Empire and the personal wellbeing of an individual ... the enemies of that Empire of Health, which should be the birth right of each of us are many.' Having associated the Boers with bacteria and contagion, Beecham's declared to the reader that 'you may therefore unhesitatingly and at once put Beecham's pills into supreme command if you

threatened by an invasion.’ In the *ILN* the following day the same image was used in an advert propounding: ‘Guard Yourself.’ As in the Bovril examples, Beecham’s allied itself to the war effort, utilising contemporaneous concerns about troops’ health to promote its health-giving properties for the wider population. For the majority of the time, however, its advertising related to the domestic context – images dominated of once ill and now healthy children, recovered mothers, [and](#) the elderly and infirm made better.

Much the same pattern is evident in techniques used to promote tea and cocoa. Both the UK Tea Company and Lipton’s, frequently seen in adverts being drunk by explorers in the jungles of equatorial Africa or as respite during a tiger hunt in India, consistently accentuated their purity and quality in promotional materials.⁴⁴ The location of the home was just as commonly seen in adverts as the colonial landscape. Cadbury’s, likewise, tapped into consumer demand for nutritional drinks. Indeed, a series of studies have confirmed that chocolate broke into the British market as a drink precisely because it could market itself as tasty, nutritious, and medicinal. Martha Makra Graziano asserts that cocoa became a nineteenth-century health food and medicine.⁴⁵ Advertising bears this out. In 1906, as the government empowered Local Education Authorities to provide milk at school, Cadbury’s ran a series of advertisements entitled ‘A Word to Mothers.’ One advert shows a healthy-looking mother holding a healthy-looking child, allowing the child to drink from her cup. The text of the advert states: ‘There is little to choose between Cadbury’s absolutely pure cocoa essence and milk, so closely allied are they in composition. It is highly nourishing, and as a daily beverage for growing children it is unexcelled.’ (*ILN*, 10 March 1906).

Several key themes have become clear. At times of war, companies exploited military contexts to market their products; at times in which race was under discussion, racial imagery was used. While some of the more mundane adverts cited here do not tend to feature in scholarship, it is images with unambiguous racial demarcations that have been the most commonly reproduced as examples of late-Victorian advertising. Yet, attention to health and nutrition reveals to us

that advertisers manipulated fears about the racial health of the British (Anglo-Saxons in some phrasing) to sell their goods, and that these tropes dominated. This is not a surprise: concern about national health led to contemporary demands for 'national efficiency' – that is, state intervention to raise up the quality of British racial stock (no pun intended). The working-class mother, moreover, was subject to an onslaught of advertising reminding her of her responsibility to her children. Schools were required to teach girls in the skills of motherhood; the 'foremost duty' of women, according to one education manual, was 'protecting the quality and ensuring the continuance of the English race, nation and empire by being a good mother.'⁴⁶ Anna Davin's meticulous research into state attempts to influence women's behaviour demonstrates how the raising of healthy children became a 'matter of imperial importance.'⁴⁷ In a context in which national unease was high already, the results of studies showing a declining birth rate contributed to increased anxiety about Britain's future strength. Advertising exploited this trepidation, seeking to 'sensationalize parental fears' (in Lori Anne Loeb's words) to emphasize the necessity of their nutritional and healthy goods.⁴⁸ Emphasis on mothers as consumers reflected the fact that women were the most likely consumers of domestic goods. Indeed, as Loeb has shown, women were the 'clear audience for most nineteenth-century advertisements' and were subjected to 'all the puffery and paraphernalia that a Victorian consumer society could supply.' Advertisers, Loeb demonstrates, operated on the basis that 'the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that buys the boots.'⁴⁹ This observation is substantiated by advertising for condensed formula milk. Despite concern at the time about insufficient breast feeding and germ-riddled bottle teats, adverts exhorting mothers to buy condensed milk to feed their young were commonplace, and increasingly so in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ The high employment rate of working-class mothers created a market ripe for exploitation. Allenburys, for instance, frequently reproduced images of idyllic scenes of contented, rested mothers and bouncing babies. In 1899, Allenburys staple slogan was launched: 'a progressive dietary, unique in providing nourishment suited to the

growing digestive powers of young infants from birth upwards' (*Graphic*, 16 September 1899). That line of persuasion remained, though as the state took an increased role in the wellbeing of children through registrations of births, medical testing, and provision of milk in schools, advertising techniques subtly altered. In 1907, Allenburys appealed to mothers of newborns explicitly to give their child the best head start in life, and that included preparing them for school: 'mothers should early recognize how essential good health is for the success of their child' (*ILN*, 3 August 1907). Advertising responded to government insistence on breastfeeding. In 1905, an advert insisted that 'Allenburys milk foods are similar in composition to and are as easy of digestion as maternal milk' (*Daily Mail*, 4 May 1905). Full-page spreads, citing expert after expert and displaying growth charts documenting the health of babies raised on formula milk, were produced. In one such advert, advice is given on all aspects of child rearing and self-care for the mother. Published at the time the Children Act was passing through parliament, it is no surprise that the advert emphasized Allenburys was a useful ally in the protection of and raising of healthy children (*Daily Mail*, 11 August 1908). There is nothing explicitly imperial about these adverts; nor there is there anything immediately racial in the text of these adverts. Understood in the context of widespread debate and discussion about the racial health of the nation, however, these adverts take on new meaning since they propounded women's civic and patriotic responsibilities to raise future citizens of the empire. Advertising that appealed to health, especially the health of children, was part of a wider discourse of imperialism – one that dominated domestic discussion about Britain's national and imperial wellbeing, and one that marketing companies knew how to exploit just as effectively as they did conditions of war or moments in which questions of racial difference were at the forefront of public debate.

There are several conclusions we can draw from this preliminary study, and several ways in which these findings can inform future research. First, more analysis needs to be undertaken

that understands women as the primary targets of advertising companies and the main consumers of advertising. Indeed, the preponderance of advertising for health, hygiene, and nutritional products need to be evaluated as part of a wider investigation of the reach of domestic discourses of imperial ideology. This is especially the case since advertisers evidently targeted women's gendered obligations to home and nation and, by extension, empire. Second, the increase in imperial tropes used in advertising is clear; when empire was front-page news (and there was a lot of newsworthy imperial stories in this period) advertisers exploited current affairs to help make their products more appealing to consumers. Yet, focus on 'race' as a core component of imperialism suggests that although some advertising sought to exploit racial difference to sell their products, many other examples (often by the same companies) instead situated their promotional pitch to consumers in the context of the racial health of the British. By searching for and finding the 'ordinary' we can identify additional ways in which contemporary languages of imperialism, through the illustrated press, formed a central part of late-Victorian and Edwardian consumer culture. Third, then, the value of adverts as historical sources should not be decided merely by the extent to which they illustrate explicit imperial themes. In the twenty-first century, we are mad for Victoriana, and we appear particularly fascinated by late-Victorian racism. Perhaps, on the one hand, these artefacts of an age long gone serve as reassurance that we, as cultured moderns, have progressed beyond the reprehensible worldview of our ancestors. On the other hand, studies that have looked for empire in adverts — and have found it in visual representations of race difference and militarism — serve an important function in reminding us just how embedded such racist stereotypes were and, in some cases, remain.

I began this essay with a quotation from William Stead Junior's advertising manual. It is apposite to conclude with another. 'The newspaper', Stead Junior wrote, 'is a microcosm of national life. A glance over the advertising columns of a large morning paper shows reflected, as it were in a mirror, the whole of the active life of the people.'⁵¹ The study of a range of

advertises in the context of their responsibility to the news proves Stead Junior's observation to be insightful. Based on ideas explored in this essay, one might speculate that adverts did not need to be explicitly imperial to indicate an enduring influence of imperialism on consumer culture generally.

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Figure 13.1 ‘The Formula of British Conquest.’ *Illustrated London News* (27 August 1887).

Source: Image courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.

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Figure 13.2 ‘Bovril’s Part in the South African War’, *Daily Mail* (24 September 1900).

Source: Used with permission of Solo Syndication on behalf of the *Daily Mail*.

¹ This essay is part of a larger study of the advertising content of several national newspapers between 1882 and 1902. Findings presented here are speculative. Please email the author for further information. I’d like to thank students at Manchester and Loughborough who studied my third-year module on popular imperialism and popular culture, especially Matthew Foukes whose subsequent dissertation on advertising history I supervised.

² W. Stead Junior, *The Art of Advertising: Its Theory and Practice Fully Described* (London: T.B. Browne, 1899), 17, 25.

³ John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880–1980* (London: Longman, 1994). For a general history of advertising, see Diana Hindley and Geoffrey Hindley, *Advertising in Victorian England, 1837–1901* (London: Wayland, 1972) and Terence Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982). On the economic history of advertising, and the debate about chronological turning points, see Roy Church, “Advertising consumer goods in nineteenth-century Britain: new perspectives,” *Economic History Review*, 13, no. 4 (2000): 621–45.

⁴ Martin Hewitt, *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain: The End of the ‘Taxes on Knowledge’, 1849–1869* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

⁵ Paul Johnson, “Conspicuous consumption and working-class culture in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, no. 38 (1998): 27–42.

⁶ For more on the professionalization of advertising agencies, see Hindleys, *Advertising in Victorian England*, 27–41. See also Jane Chapman, *Comparative Media History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 87–88.

⁷ John Hewitt, “Designing the Poster in England, 1890–1914,” *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 5, no. 1 (2007): 57–70.

⁸ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.

⁹ Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 171.

¹⁰ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 59, 58; M. Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

¹¹ Quoted in the Hindleys, *Advertising in Victorian England*, 29.

¹² Stead Junior, *Art of Advertising*, 98.

¹³ Quoted in the Hindleys, *Advertising in Victorian England*, 67.

¹⁴ Stead Junior, *Art of Advertising*, 134.

¹⁵ Peter Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: The Politics of History Teaching in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Michelle Smith, *Empire in British Girls’ Literature: Imperial Girls, 1880–1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Marty Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* (London: Routledge, 2011); Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really*

Thought about Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). To my mind, one of the most useful assessments of the debate remains Stuart Ward's 'Echoes of Empire', *History Workshop Journal* 62, no. 1 (2006): 264–68.

¹⁷ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*; Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), ch. 3 'Selling Darkest Africa.' Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), ch. 5, 'Soft Soaping Empire: commodity racism and imperial advertising'.

¹⁸ Robert Opie, *Rule Britannia: Trading on the British Image* (London: Viking, 1985). See also the selection of images in Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins, *Illustrating Empire: A Visual History of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2011).

¹⁹ See, for instance, the book to accompany to Bodleian's exhibition on the visual culture of empire: Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins, *Illustrating Empire*. See also the advertisingarchives.co.uk website in which the reader is invited to search by categories, one of which is race. (Accessed June 27, 2017).

²⁰ Anandi Ramamurthy, 'Absences and Silences: The representations of the tea picker in colonial and fairtrade advertising', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 13, no. 3 (2012): 367–81.

²¹ The press was awash with all things Stanley and, subsequently, 'Stanleymania.' In an early nod towards the consumption of the 'celebrity' there's an interesting blurring between Stanley as the promotional hook for selling the object and the object as the hook to sell Stanley. See Richards, *Commodity Culture*: 122–31; Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: eCulture of eExploration and eEmpire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), ch.6; Clare Pettitt, 'Exploration in Print: from the miscellany to the newspaper', in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, ed. Dane Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 80–108.

²² Professional endorsements were a key technique used by advertisers to demonstrate the superiority of one brand over another. Lori Anne Loeb observes the gradual replacement by the turn of the century of the medical or scientific authority by the celebrity, including military and explorer heroes. *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 4: 'The Hero for Sale.'

²³ Keith Surridge, 'More than a great poster: Lord Kitchener and the image of the military hero', *Historical Research*, 74, no. 185 (2001): 298–313.

²⁴ This example relates to an advert in the *Graphic* (28 April 1900) by Ogden's Guinea-Gold cigarette in which Cronje, a Boer general, is captured and made a prisoner of war. Like many adverts, the image was reused and to be seen in multiple publications across several weeks. See Richards, *Commodity Culture*: 160–61.

²⁵ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*: 13.

²⁶ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*: 179.

²⁷ See Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*: 26–30; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 213–15.

²⁸ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*: 28.

²⁹ Ramamurthy develops analysis into gendered representations of the black body in soap advertising, finding African men 'were depicted as helpless babies and African women were represented as happy in servitude.' *Imperial Persuaders*: 60.

³⁰ For detailed analysis, see Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*: 37–40 and McClintock, *Imperial Leather*: 225–26. Richards, *Commodity Culture*: 140–42.

³¹ Richard Fulton, 'The Sudan Sensation', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 42, no. 1 (2009): 37–63.

³² As Simon Popple argues, the second Boer War was perhaps the first genuinely media war: news from the front arrived rapidly, theatres and music halls responded in near real-time, and images circulated widely. Understood as part of this culture in which the visual reproduced and negotiated the most up-to-date news, it is possible further to advance the claim of topicality. Simon Popple, 'Fresh From the Front': performance, war news and popular culture during the Boer War', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 8, no. 4 (2010): 401–18.

³³ Kenneth Morgan, 'The Boer War and the media (1899–1902)', *Twentieth-Century British History*, 13, no. 1 (2002): 1–13. See also Paula Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire: pPublic dDiscourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁴ In addition to Richards, *Commodity Culture*: 158, McClintock, *Imperial Leather*: 226, see: Glenn Wilkinson, 'To the Front': British Newspaper Advertising and the Boer War', in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience, Image*, ed. John Gooch (London: Routledge, 2013 ed.): 203–12; Lesley Steinitz, 'Bovril: A very beefy (and British) love affair', <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/bovril-a-very-beefy-and-british-love-affair>, 5 July 2013 (accessed 25 June 2017).

³⁵ 'British-made' was a line frequently used by cigarette manufacturers. This takes on added significance in the context of attempted American buyout of British tobacco companies. See Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture, 1800–2000: pPerfect pPleasures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 86; Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: eCommerce, eConsumption, and eCivil sSociety in mModern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 29.

³⁶ Mike Dempsey, *Pipe Dreams: eEarly aA Advertising aArt from the Imperial Tobacco Company* (London: Pavilion, 1982): 40.

³⁷ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 5 (1978): 15–16.

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- ³⁸ Geoffrey Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 60–61.
- ³⁹ Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses, 1854–1914* (London: Routledge, 1988), 205–206.
- ⁴⁰ Steinitz, “Bovril: A very beefy (and British) love affair”; David Waller, *The Perfect Man: The Muscular Life and Times of Eugen Sandow, Victorian Strongman* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011). In 1904, Bovril published an advert containing text from a letter of gratitude from the Antarctic explorer Robert Falcon Scott. Scott lauded Bovril as ‘excellent’, giving ‘every satisfaction’, helping keep the men sustained in the cold. *Daily Mail*, 8 November 1904.
- ⁴¹ Martin Daunt, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 420.
- ⁴² Derek Oddy, “Working-Class Diets in late nineteenth-century Britain,” *Economic History Review*, no. 23 (1970): 314–23.
- ⁴³ On supplies available to troops, see Edward Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 160.
- ⁴⁴ In addition to Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, 93–130, see Julie Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008).
- ⁴⁵ Martha Makra Graziano, “Food of the Gods as Mortals’ Medicine: the uses of chocolate and cacao products,” *Pharmacy in History*, 40, no. 4 (1988): 132–46.
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- ⁴⁷ Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” 14.
- ⁴⁸ Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 114.
- ⁴⁹ Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 5, 8.
- ⁵⁰ Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” 25–27.
- ⁵¹ Stead Junior, *Art of Advertising*, 28.