THE TRIUMPH HERALD

&

THE BMW

Brexit and the Myths of English History

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For Sir David Bostock K.C.M.G. (1948-2016)
Great European

We are English, and that is one good fact.

Oliver Cromwell,
Protector of the Commonwealth
of England, Scotand and Ireland (1653-58).

Messieurs, l'Angleterre est une île, et je devrais m'arrêter là.
(Sirs, England is an Island, and I ought to leave it at that).

André Siegfried (1875-1959).

So what really moves the opponents of Britain's full participation in the EC? As much as anything it is frustration… that we are no longer a world power…that nowhere is the nation state fully sovereign… that some of the fixed and treasured aspects of our national life are subject to seemingly relentless change. They practice a sort of phantom grandeur, a clanking of unusable suits of armour.

Sir John Major, 1993.

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INTRODUCTION

THE TRIUMPH HERALD & THE B.M.W.

24 June 2016; the result of the EU Referendum; scenes of excitement in my local pub; someone I knew raised his fist in the air, and cried that 'we' had won. Who are the 'we', I wondered. Alex Salmond said the Scottish lion had roared all over Scotland, after the SNP won 56 of the 59 available seats in the elections for the Scottish Parliament in 2015. That night in June 2016, I thought I heard the roar of the English lion.

Then I had a dream.

I dreamed that I had owned a Triumph Herald in the 1960s (this much was true.) Then, after an uncertain period of time, I owned a BMW. (Not true). I went to the car dealer I had bought the BMW from and said that I had decided, after 40 years, that I preferred the Triumph Herald and wanted it back, or at least another one.

The dealer was surprised, even shocked. He pointed out that the BMW was a superior vehicle in every way. It had a larger and more reliable engine, power steering, much better brakes, and electronics which we could only have dreamed of in the 1960s.

He asked if I had any complaints about the BMW. I said I had none. It was just that I was not fond of it, whereas I had once had a great deal of affection for the Herald, with all its faults.

The dealer pointed out that I had not bought the Triumph Herald from him, and it might be a tad difficult to get hold of one now. Even if he were wrong, it would cost me dear. Did I not know that the last Herald had been produced in 1970; and the Triumph Motor Company had ceased production around 1980. Actually, he understood that the marque now belonged to BMW…

He smiled as he told me this; but the look on my face must have told him that I was not for turning.

It might be possible to get an old one, he said - there was a still a market for them in New Zealand; but it would be much more expensive than any equivalent car which was available in Europe. Even if I was prepared to pay more, he was sure that I would soon find the old Herald was much smaller, less powerful, and less reliable than the car I had now; and, what's more, it would make me look like an

idiot.

He paused. Did I want to change my mind? After all, what I wanted to do was rather like insisting that I preferred planes with propellers, in the jet age.

I said I had considered the matter carefully, and had made up my mind. I did not need any further information. I wanted to own and drive a Triumph Herald again, because it would remind me of my youth and it was made in England. Wasn't that a good enough reason?

The dealer, who clearly thought I was mad, but also that the customer was always right, closed the conversation by saying:

> 'Well, all right then, but you will have to pay me what you owe me on the bloody BMW, before you can have the damned Triumph Herald'.

Where did the dream come from? Why did I feel, so strongly, that the result of the referendum was an unmitigated disaster, while others felt equally strongly, that it was both a declaration of independence and a cause for celebration? It seemed to me that the answer must lie in our history.

I was born in 1948 in Manchester, and brought up in Liverpool, where it was still relevant whether you were Protestant or Catholic, and the question of why the monasteries were dissolved by Henry VIII was still a matter of lively debate at school (at least among those of us who thought that there was more to life than football). There were several Catholic schools in the neighbourhood, but I never went inside their gates. I attended an Anglican primary school and an all-boys grammar school. I learned a traditional, Protestant version of English history; and I am sure that it was little different from the version which my parents had learned in the 1920s, or the one which had been taught to their parents in the 1890s.

Both at home and at school, I was taught by my parents and grandparents that British was best. The British Empire was the largest in the world, and it had brought civilisation, along with Christianity and the English language, to many countries. True, it was somewhat smaller than it had once been, and it had been re-named, but we still celebrated Empire Day in the 1950s, and it was only in 1960 that Harold Macmillan made his speech about the 'winds of change' sweeping through Africa. The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, in 1953, was widely regarded as marking a new 'Elizabethan Age'. The British armed forces were still the best in the world. Had not England just defeated Germany, for the second time? The English system of government was the best there was, and a model for the 'Free World'. We were one of the 'Big Three', along with the USA and the USSR. We had created the first National Health Service, and introduced a system of free education for all; and we had the best footballers in the world too. It came as a considerable shock when Hungary thrashed England 6-3, in Coronation Year.

My references here to England, rather than Britain, are deliberate, because people of my parents' generation did not distinguish between the two (though they had come to accept that Ireland was different). For us Britain was England with

Celtic (or Gaelic) appendages. We might not all have read H.E.Marshall's *Our Island Story* (1905) or her *Children's History of Scotland* (1907); but our view of the world was hers. The English had created the United Kingdom by 'taking over' Wales, Scotland and Ireland, at first by conquest (or attempted conquest), but later by consent; and it was all for their own good anyway, as well as ours. We had become a happy family of nations, and put the bloodshed and the bitterness of our separate histories behind us. We had also (by and large) put religious difference to one side, though the Anglican Church was still at the heart of the Establishment.

Although Mis Marshall wrote for children, her histories were essentially simplified summaries of the narratives to be found in the great English historians of the 19th century: Lord Macaulay, William Stubbs, E.A.Freeman, J. A. Froude and J. R. Green. (For example, she explained Boadicea's revolt against the Romans by saying that Roman soldiers had been 'rude' to her daughters.) It was her view of English history which inspired many of the public monuments which were erected just over a century ago, and which are still to be found in our cities today.

Marshall's rosy Anglocentric view of our history (as imparted by schoolteachers to generations of schoolchildren) was lovingly pilloried in *1066 and All That*, which was published in 1930; but it survived the radical revision of our history exemplified by A.L.Morton's *People's History of England* of 1938; and it also survived two World Wars; the Irish War of Independence; the Egyptian Revolution; the grant of independence to British India; and the foundation of nationalist parties in Wales and Scotland. As late as 1965, the Socialist historian A.J.P.Taylor could still write a book about British history entitled *English History, 1914-1945*, though he felt that he now had to apologise for this:

> When the *Oxford History of England* was launched a generation ago, 'England' was still an all-embracing word. It meant indiscriminately England and Wales; Great Britain; the United Kingdom; and even the British Empire. Foreigners used it as the name of a Great Power and indeed continue to do so. Bonar Law, a Scotch Canadian, was not ashamed to describe himself as 'Prime Minister of England', as Disraeli, a Jew by birth, had done before him.

More recently, I have learned that what was true in England was true in Wales. History continued, for many years, to be written and taught from the British (that is, English) perspective. The consequence was that:

> The study of the history of Wales was 'marginalized, even within Wales itself. In some historical quarters its practitioners were often looked on with a kind of amused tolerance and a feeling that they ought to have been able to find something more useful to do. The framers of examination syllabuses strove gallantly to ensure a place for Welsh history in the curriculum, but teaching in Welsh

schools concentrated on the history of England. (A.D.Carr).

Scotland has had a very different history from Wales, but Magnus Magnusson tells us that Scottish history continued to be taught and written from the British point of view when he was at school, thanks in part to the lasting influence of Sir Walter Scott.

Things have changed a great deal in the last fifty years. An incalculable number of books have been published, on all aspects of the ground I have covered here; and there have also been startling advances in archaeology and genetic research, of which I am almost entirely ignorant.

Nevertheless, I hope I have done justice to all the historians I have cited, and the different traditions which they represent. My conclusions, about the deep roots of the vote to Leave in English nationalism, are my own.

Rotherham
South Yorkshire
February, 2018

CHAPTER ONE

BORIS JOHNSON & THE ROMAN EMPIRE

> We will never reproduce the Roman Empire, with its huge and peaceable unity of races and nations. But if history teaches us anything it is that we are fated never to stop trying.
>
> Boris Johnson, 2006

At the time of writing Boris Johnson is the Foreign Secretary, in a government which has triggered the process for leaving the European Union in March 2019. Before he became an M.P. he was *The Daily Telegraph*'s correspondent in Brussels, where he attracted a considerable following by denigrating the EU and all its works and institutions. Dennis McShane has written that Boris 'spent 25 years of political activism denouncing the EU with vigour and style'. In 2016, he brought this journalistic approach to the campaign for Leaving the Union. On 15 May 2016 he told the *Telegraph* that, while the bureaucrats in Brussels were using "different methods" from Adolf Hitler, they "share the aim of unifying Europe under one authority". Further, he warned that the EU's "disastrous" failures had allegedly fuelled tensions between member states and allowed Germany to grow in power, "take over" the Italian economy, and "destroy" Greece.; but there is a more accurate guide to his confusion about the nature of the EU, in his short history of the Roman Empire.

The Dream of Rome

The Dream of Rome (published in 2006) is an amusing account of why the Roman Empire was so successful, for so long. It is well written, and the way in which the author describes the monuments he visits – the Triumphal Arch in Orange; the *Pont du Gard* in Provence; the funerary monuments in Trier; *Monte Testaccio* in Rome, and Vindolanda in Northumberland - is both vivid and informative; but the immediate

relevance of the book is not what it tells us about the Roman Empire but what it tells us about Johnson's attitude to the EU.

What did the Romans ever do for us? Johnson answers the notorious question put in *The Life of Brian* by reference to the Roman Peace (or *Pax Romana*) which prevailed throughout the vast Empire, the towns, roads, baths and theatres built by the Romans, and the literacy and culture they brought with them. In a word, they created a civilisation rather than a mere state; and, we know from Professor Mary Beard's magisterial *S.P.Q.R.* (2015) that citizenship was open to everyone, regardless of race or religion. H. E. Marshall, whose book *Our Island Story* was published in 1905, was not necessarily wrong, just because she wrote in a manner which sounds old-fashioned to us now:

> Soon the Britons began to understand that the Romans could give them some things which were worth having. So there was much more peace in the land… The Romans taught the Britons many things. They taught them how to build better houses and how to make good roads, how to read and write, and much more that was good and useful.

But would Boris really want to re-create the Roman Empire? Of course not – he recognises that the Romans imposed their will by force and with considerable bloodshed and loss of liberty. However, in an ideal world, he would have his Roman cake and eat it.

> We would avoid the slavery and the mines and the psychotic cult of the ego; the militarism and the cruelty. But we would want the religious tolerance, the racial tolerance, the intellectual tolerance and curiosity. We would surely want the laissez-faire government of the High Empire, in which the economy grew and the people prospered with minimal bureaucracy and regulation.

Now here we have arrived at the heart of the matter – the reason why Boris admires Rome and despises the EU. Clearly there is too much bureaucracy and red tape in modern Europe, by comparison with the Roman Empire, where 'the Emperor governed an Empire of 80 million people with 150 officials'.

I don't know where Johnson gets his figure of 150 from (or when and where these 'high imperial' conditions prevailed); but I seriously doubt its accuracy. After all, one theory as to why the Western Roman Empire declined and fell is precisely because the State was too large, and extracted too much in taxes from the working population, while the Byzantines have never enjoyed a reputation for governing in an economical way. But surely the main point is that, unlike the EU, (which has no armed forces at all) the Romans had a standing army of around 300,000 in the time of Augustus and 645,000 in the time of Constantine the Great. So it is a bit rich to praise them for having a small State, and criticise the EU for having a large one, especially when by some definitions, the EU is not a state at all.

Elsewhere Boris criticises the EU for its approach to education, which was to encourage children to be Europeans, without employing compulsion, or even in any convincing way.

> Between the ages of eight and eleven I was educated at a marvellous place in Brussels called the European School. It has a message for its pupils. Somewhere in the grounds is a plaque bearing the words of Jean Monnet, founder of the European Community, in which he speaks of his hopes for the children. 'May they become in mind European': he says, and drones on about how he hopes they will come out of the school resolved to build a common European fatherland. Well, it didn't work on me.

Would Johnson rather have been schooled by the Romans, who drilled everyone to speak a common language, believe in the same Gods, and worship the same Emperor, if necessary crucifying those who would not acknowledge Him? Clearly not, yet he admires Augustus Caesar at the same time as he despises Jacques Delors.

Consider the scorn Boris pours on the Euro:

> Jacques Delors and other European leaders decided in the late 1980s to launch the single European currency. They knew that they were taking a huge step towards a political union in much of what had been the old Roman Empire. Now contrast the coinage of the modern eurozone. We have at least twelve different types of euro coin, some with heads, some without. As for the banknotes, they have no national characteristics at all. The contrast with Rome is so striking: the Roman coins so clear in their political message, the euro coins so desperately fudged.

So, the coins are too various and the notes are too uniform; and neither is anything like as good as the Roman currency, because the Romans did things properly, by imposing their will, rather than indulging in tiresome negotiations. The EU is damned, both for doing too little and going too far. The book is full of such contradictions. When the EU appears to act too much like a State, it is criticized for trying to become a superstate, and when it acts like the union of nation states that it is, it is criticized for being unlike Ancient Rome (the ultimate superstate).

So, what would Boris have us do? Since his return to national politics in 2015, his criticism of the EU has tended to centre on its being too strong, rather than too weak. During the referendum of 2016 he invoked Winston Churchill's war-time defiance of tyranny, urging the British people to be "the heroes of Europe" again, to set the country free (and save the EU from itself) by voting for 'Leave'.

Entertaining though his *Dream of Rome* is, Boris ignores the reality, that the Roman Empire was the product of war and conquest, was held together by military force, and fell (at least in the West) when its armies were defeated in the field, or

could no longer hold the line. Moreover, it was governed by an autocrat; and wherever it held sway, old liberties were extinguished. By contrast, the EU is the product of consensus and agreement. It is held together by a series of treaties and the rule of law. It is governed by democrats, for all the talk about the so-called 'democratic deficit' in some of its institutions. And this is without mentioning the most crucial difference of all between the ancient Roman Empire and the modern European Union, which is that member states are free to leave, in accordance with Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. It was not possible to break with Ancient Rome, as Carausius, the Roman Commander in Britain, found out in 293 C.E.

The Conquest of *Britannia*

So, what was the Roman Empire really like? We could do worse than start with the Roman conquest of Britain. Julius Caesar had invaded these Islands in 55 B.C.E., for reasons which President Lyndon Baines Johnson of the USA would have understood. When asked about J.Edgar Hoover, who was head of the F.B.I., Johnson allegedly said "it is better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in". Similarly, when informed that certain Belgic tribesmen in Gaul were both receiving assistance from Britain and taking refuge there, Caesar decided to teach the Britons a lesson, and possibly subdue them in the process.

By contrast, the Emperor Claudius had no tactical or strategic objective in mind when he authorised the invasion of 43 C.E. Further, in the interval between the two invasions, and especially after the disaster at the Battle of the Teutoberg Forest in Germany in 9 C.E., Augustus had advised his successors not to enlarge the Empire any further, According to Peter Heather, the invasion of 43 C.E. only went ahead, because the unwarlike Claudius 'wanted the glory'.

The maps show that the Roman legions swept all before them. And yet, it took the Roman army forty years to advance from Kent to the Tay, whereas Julius Caesar had conquered all three parts of Gaul in eight years, between 58 and 50 B.C.E. Moreover, there were major rebellions in Britain, in 51 (when the rebels were led by Caractacus) and in 61 C.E. (when they were led by the even more famous Boadicea, or Boudicca).

The truth is that the conquest of Britain was not only slow, it was incomplete. The Romans progressed through the South-East of 'England', the 'Home Counties', the South-West, 'East Anglia', the Midlands, Wales and 'Yorkshire', overcoming innumerable tribes in the process. Finally in 84 C.E., they crushed a large army of Caledonians at the Battle of Mons Graupius (somewhere between Abderdeen and Inverness), but then the conquest stalled. The Roman governor and general Agricola (father-in-law of Tacitus) was recalled by the Emperor Domitian, because the latter was jealous. Or that is what Tacitus tells us: it may be that Domitian thought that he needed to change direction, because in 86 or 87 C.E. he ordered a gradual

withdrawal of manpower from the North of Britain, choosing instead to reinforce the Roman frontier on the Danube,

Tacitus regarded the Province of Britannia as 'peaceful and secure' in 84 C.E.; but it is obvious from his account of Agricola's campaigns that both men regarded the failure to complete the conquest as a fundamental mistake. As it was, the Romans withdrew to a line between Carlisle and Newcastle, which Hadrian fortified in 122 C.E. Here it remained, despite two advances to a line between the Firth and the Clyde between 140 and 160 C.E. This failure was also of lasting significance. Although the Romans called it *Britannia*, the new province basically consisted of 'England' and 'Wales' only. It did not include Scotland or any part of Ireland, and it did not even include Northumberland.

The purpose of Hadrian's Wall has long been debated. 200 years ago, nobody doubted that it was built for defensive purposes, nor did H.E.Marshall:

> Julius Agricola also built a line of forts across the island from the Forth to the Clyde. He did this to keep back the wild Picts and Scots, or people of the north. For as they could not be brought under Roman rule nor tamed in any way, he thought it was better to try to shut them into their own country.

But then a curious revisionism set in. In 1952 the pamphlet published by H.M.S.O. for the Ministry of Public Building and Works about the fort at Housesteads proposed that the Wall was a customs barrier – a theory which seemed to be supported by the construction of the Vallum on the South side of the Wall, and not on the North side, where the enemy was to be found.

There was even a theory that Hadrian's Wall was built for show.

Neither of these explanations seems at all likely. Hadrian's Wall was after all unique. In many places, Rome's frontiers were marked by mountains or rivers; on the Danube, there was a wooden palisade; on the Rhine, a series of forts. Only in Britain was there a continuous wall, 78 miles long and mostly built in stone. Moreover, the Wall represented a very considerable investment. Some 18,000 soldiers and auxiliaries were employed for around 10 years in building it; and in its final form, it was part of a heavily militarised zone, which comprised (from north to south): a row of forts at a distance of 5 to 10 miles; a glacis and a deep ditch to the North of the Wall; a berm, with rows of pits; the curtain wall itself; a later military road (the Military Way) and finally the Vallum – another deep ditch with high banks on either side. Finally, there was another series of forts, including major bases for whole Legions, while the Romans also had a fleet of some size at their disposal, to provide support.

What was all this investment for? Surely, it must be connected with the fact that the Romans had failed to conquer the whole of Britain, but wanted to defend what they held, and be ready to advance once more if the Emperor gave the order. What looks like a military boundary was a military boundary.

The Vindolanda tablets are useful in this context, in particular the 'strength report' of the First Cohort of Tungrians, which is contained in tablet 154. This contains the startling information that 337 men (out of a total of 752) were at a neighbouring camp, while 46 were in London, and 54 were away on business in other parts of the country (and 31 were sick). Mary Beard thinks this that this is evidence of a dysfunctional system: she cites Pliny, who told the Emperor Trajan that too many soliders were absent from their units; but this is not how Alan Bowman, the editor of the Vindolanda tablets, reads the report. He regards it as evidence that the garrison as a whole was being put to good use, given that the Romans did not go in for 'continuous permiter defence'. He also points out that the Vindolanda tablets as a whole are evidence that the Romans had a weapon of strategic importance, (which the barbarians certainly did not have), which was literacy. This gave them the opportunity to file reports, send messages and co-ordinate their defences.

The Roman defences in the North of Britain worked well enough for a time. There were occasions - in 180, 197, 296 and 367 C.E. - when the Wall was breached by invaders who went on to cause considerable damage to Roman fortresses and civilian settlements in the North of England; but in general the Wall served its primary purpose. In the end, it was not a case of the barbarians storming the Wall, but rather of the Romans abandoning it, to concentrate their forces elsewhere.

In the late 4th century, the focus of Roman attention switched from the Northern land frontier to the South and East coasts. The main threat now came from a new kind of barbarian – not from the British, who usually travelled by land, but from the Anglo-Saxons, who came by sea. It is in this context that the massive forts of the 'Saxon Shore' were constructed. These are listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which lists Brancaster, Burgh Castle, and Caister-on-Sea (in Norfolk); Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex; Reculver, Richborough, Dover Castle, Lympne (Kent); Pevensey Castle (East Sussex) and Portchester Castle (Hampshire), while it names the supreme commander as the "Count of the Saxon Shore in Britain".

Given that the Romans were in Britain for some 400 years, the question arises as to how Roman were the Romano-British? The seminal text is to be found in Tacitus's *Agricola*. The historian tells us that when his father in law was first appointed Governor of Britain, he devised a plan to 'civilise' the local population:

> To induce a people, hitherto scattered, uncivilized and therefore prone to fight, to grow pleasurably inured to peace and ease, Agricola encouraged individuals and assisted communities to build temples, public squares and proper houses. Furthermore, he trained the sons of the leading men in the liberal arts and preferred the natural ability of the Britanni over the trained skill of the Gauls. The result was that in place of distaste for the Latin language there came a passion to command it. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so they strayed into the enticements of vice - porticoes, baths and sumptuous banquets.

In *S.P.Q.R.* Mary Beard is sceptical about the idea that Agricola had a 'local education policy' of this kind; but, even if one discounts that idea, the above passage provides good evidence for a degree of Romanisation, amongst some classes and in some areas.

On the face of it, the Vindolanda tablets corroborate Tacitus. Here we find evidence that the men and women living in Vindolanda before the construction of Hadrian's Wall were able to enjoy foodstuffs of all kinds and import goods and building materials from all over the province of Britannia and beyond (including Celtic beer and the fish sauce which features so large in Boris Johnson's book). At least one officer's wife threw a birthday party to which she invited her friends; and the excavation of the Severan fort ditch (which dates from 212 C.E.) uncovered 421 Roman shoes, some of them of great sophistication, and many of which must have been thrown away when hardly used. This was more or less the view taken by Patrick Wormald (1947-2004), perhaps the greatest Anglo-Saxon scholar of his generation, though even he qualified what he said very heavily:

> It is obvious that Britain was significantly Romanised. Upwards of six hundred villas are known, and more emerge all the time; there were over twenty important cities and many more small towns; a high proportion of the population was bilingual – if not monolingual in Latin. On the other hand, literary culture did not apparently take root: we have nothing from the pens of known British provincials before the Christian writers, Pelagius and Patrick, from the last years of the province's history. A simple comparison of the English and French languages shows that *Romanitas* was eventually lost to Britannia in ways that it was not to Gallia.
>
> (Wormald, *London Review of Books*, 19 November 1981).

The Vindolanda tablets, by and large, only provide evidence about the Roman garrison there, plus their subordinates, dependants and associates. They do not tell us much about the Romano-British population, except that on one occasion, in tablet 164, an officer in the Roman army tells us this:

> *Nudi sunt(?) Brittones nimium multi equites gladis non utuntur equites nec resident <u>Brittunculi</u> ut iaculos mittant.*
>
> The Britons are unprotected by armour(?). There are very many cavalry. The cavalry do not use swords nor do the <u>wretched</u> Britons mount in order to throw javelins.

If this tablet is typical, Tacitus's comments about the extent to which Roman culture was adopted in Britain may need to be viewed with some caution.

Looking at the physical remains – not just at the Hadrian's Wall 'complex', and at the numerous fortresses of one kind and another in the North of England and, on the other hand, at the sumptuous villas at Fishbourne and Lullingstone in the South of England, and at the City of Bath in the West, the conclusion must be that there was a 'North-South divide' in Roman Britain, that is to say a real contrast between the thoroughly Romanised South of England, and a militarised zone in the North. There was also a contrast between these Islands as a whole, where large areas were never brought under Roman control and where the area that was subdued was not thoroughly Romanised, and a Province like Gaul, where the entire territory was both conquered and comprehensively submerged into Roman civilisation.

Downfall

In his monumental *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) Edward Gibbon proposed that Rome declined before it fell. More specifically, she declined in moral terms, in that the triumph of Christianity undermined her original martial virtues. No-one accepts this nowadays; nor do most scholars agree that there was a general economic crisis in the later Roman Empire. According to Peter Heather (see *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2005) that theory found favour wth academics in the 1960s, but lacks archaeological evidene to support it. The modern consensus is that the Empire did not in any meaningful sense decline before it fell, even in the West (it obviously survived in the East, until 1453). Instead, it was killed off, militarily and then physically, by invading Barbarians – Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Franks, Lombards, Angles, Saxons and others, who were in turn pushed westwards by the Huns in the 5th century.

But this narrative does not entirely explain what happened in Britain. The conventional account – as commonly related some fifty years ago – was that there was an 'Antonine peace' in the 2nd century, and a 'Severan peace' in the early 3rd century; but that things started to go downhill from there.

As early as the 230s, the Romans started to withdraw units from the Hadrianic frontier and garrison them at locations in the south, and they also started to build new forts at Brancaster, Caister-on-Sea and Reculver. Other forts in the group which – as we have seen - came to be known as the Forts of the Saxon Shore. It was long thought that these forts were demonstrated the magnitude of the Saxon threat in the fourth century, but they originally date from the third century, when the Saxons were not a threat to Britain. On the other hand, there was something unique about Britain in the 3rd century C.E., which was rebellion by a Roman commander.

In the 1960s the syllabus for Modern English History at the University of Oxford began with the rebellion of Carausius in 286 C.E. He was the most important of a series of usurpers, who took advantage of Britain's unique position as

a large island on the edge of the Roman world; and while it would be anachronistic to call him the first Brexiteer, he did try to take Britain out of the Roman world, and his slogan does seem to have been that he was going to make the Province great again.

Aurelius Mausaeus Valerius Carausius was a general, originally from Gaul, who had successfully commanded the fleet in Britain in actions against Frankish and Saxon pirates. In 286 or 287 he learned that the Emperor Maximian had given orders that he be executed, for alleged corruption. His response was to declare himself Emperor in Britain and northern Gaul. It is very difficult to know what Carausius's true objectives really were. Conceivably he wanted to make the Province more secure; and may have thought that, by seizing control of the fleet and of the legions stationed in Britain, he could more easily resist the renewed attacks of invaders of all descriptions; and perhaps he was simply interested in saving his own skin. However, all we really know about him is derived from the coinage he issued; and so we know that he did issue good quality coins, with legends such as *Restitutor Britanniae* (Restorer of Britain) and *Genius Britanniae* (Spirit of Britain).

Carausius remained in power for seven years, and a milestone from Carlisle with his name on it suggests that the whole of Roman Britain was at one stage within his grasp but, in 293 he was assassinated by his subordinate Allectus, who was in turn defeated and killed by Imperial forces three years later.

As the 4th century progressed, there were increasing attacks on Roman Britain, from all sides. One of these was involved a people known as the 'Picts', who were first recorded in 305-6 CE; but then 'Picts' is merely an Anglicisation of Picti, 'the painted ones', so it is difficult to know who they were and where exactly they came from. In 367, in an event called the 'Great Barbarian Conspiracy', Roman Britan was assaulted by Scoti and Attacotti from the North and West and Saxons from the East, who may even have been joined by some rebellios elements from the garrison on Hadrian's Wall. In undertstanding this threat, it is important to realise that 'Scoti' was the Roman word for the Irish, who had not yet started to emigrate into South-West Scotland. In any event, the crisis was serious, and would seem to indicate a deterioration in Britain's strategic position. The Province was after all, surrounded by the sea, while having a land frontier to the North. Once barbarian raiders had mastered the arts of shipbuilding and sailing, they could mount a surprise attack on any exposed coast; and raiders from Ireland were always in a position to outflank Hadrian's Wall. The results were made obvious by a number of finds made by archaeologists in Ireland:

> In 1854 a hoard of Roman loot was found at Ballinrees, just west of Coleraine, including 1,500 silver coins, silver ingots and silver bars weighing five kilograms. Five hundred silver coins were unearthed near the Giant's Causeway, three hundred more nearby at Bushmills, and in 1940 pieces of cut silver plate and four silver ingots were discovered at Balline in Co. Limerick. (*A History of Ireland in 250 Episodes*, by Jonathan Bardon)

Eventually, the military position declined so badly that the imperial authorities gave up. The last act in the history of Roman Britain is conventionally thought to have occurred in and after 410-411 C.E. when (according to Zosimus, a Greek historian living in Constantinople at the end of the 5th century) the Romano-British communities appealed to Rome for help; but, the appeal was rejected by the Emperor Honorius in 410 C.E. Then in the text called the *Rescript of Honorius* of 411, the Emperor told the British *civitates* (or regional communities) to look to their own defence, as Rome was too busy fighting usurpers in the south of Gaul and trying to deal with the Visigoths, who were active in Italy itself, to provide assistance.

In fact, it was only later, in the middle of the 5th century that the Anglo-Saxons started to arrive in force, and to settle in England, pushing in from their landing places on the East and South coasts, and eventually founding the petty kingdoms which were to grow into what the Victorians called the 'Heptarchy.' The word indicates that there were at one time seven kingdoms, those of Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria; but there were many more than seven to begin with. Gradually, in ways that can only be guessed at, they did coalesce, since the early Anglo-Saxon kings were warlords, with a taste for aggression and expansion.

Early Anglo-Saxon history is exceptionlally obscure. There are really only three written sources – Gildas, Bede and the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, which can all be read in different ways. The rest has to be deduced from the archaeology, which is also subject to varying interpretations. DNA tests conducted in recent years do suggest, however, that the Anglo-Saxons intermarried and mingled with the Romano-Britons to a very considerable extent, rather than driving them out wholesale, as Gildas recounted in his lurid description of the 'destruction of Britain', written around 550. Yet his view is one which commanded wide support until the second half of the 20th century.

In *Britannia - The Failed State: Tribal Conflict and the End of Roman Britain* (2008) Stuart Laycock advances a radically different thesis, in which he draws parallels between late Roman Britain, Bosnia (in the 1990s) and Iraq after the invasion of 2003. The comparisons between an ancient society and two modern states may or may not be apt – one can think of many differences as well as similarities - but Laycock does seem to provide a plausible model for the period he writes about, and succeeds in tying the theory to the archaeological evidence.

Laycock points out that it is as unhelpful and inaccurate to refer to the various tribes whom the Romans encountered in and after 43 C.E. as 'Britons', as it would be to refer nowadays to all the inhabitants of the modern EU as 'Europeans'. He writes of:

> The many different peoples, nations in many senses, that made up Britain at the time and who were often separated from each other by huge cultural and political differences.

Laycock also points out that the British tribes were at war with one another for much of the time, and specifically at the time of the Claudian invasion. There is support for this view in Tacitus:

> The Britanni show some spirit: they have not yet been softened by protracted peace…. At one time they owed obedience to kings; now they are divided into factions and groups under rival leaders.

An original suggestion (so far as I know) is that Hadrian's Wall was built along a line which cut through Brigantian territory so that, after it was built, there were members of the same tribe who were left stranded on either side. If this is right, then the Wall may have resembled the Berlin Wall, rather than the Mexican Wall of Donald Trump's imagination. In other words, it was built, at least in part, to keep people in, as well as keep them out.

There came a time when the Roman entrusted the local communities (or *civitates*) in Britain with a measure of self-government; and this is usually seen as a sign of assimilation and Romanisation; but Laycock produces archaeological evidence that, when the iron grip of Rome started to relax, these communities started to re-arm and re-engage in the kind of tribal warfare which they had indulged in before the Claudian invasion. This resurgence of inter-tribal warfare after the disappearance of Roman control in Britain goes far to explain why the Britons were unable to resist the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons, although they must have been numerically superior. Furthermore, it would also explain the stories told by Gildas, Bede and the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, to the effect that the first of the Anglo-Saxon invaders were mercenaries, who were invited in by the tyrant Vortigern, who hired them to fight for him in a British civil war.

The Roman Legacy

We must close by considering once more the question of what the Romans did for us. There are several things which come to my mind, in no particular order.

Firstly, they bequeathed the name *Britannia*, which became the name for the largest island in the archipelago in most European languages, including modern English and modern Welsh (*Prydain*). In course of time *Britannia* also became a symbol, and was personified as a goddess armed with trident and shield and wearing a Corinthian helmet.

Secondly, Latin became the language of the Christian church in Britain as a whole, and hence the language of monks, priests and friars, and (almost exclusively) the language of learning, as well as a *lingua franca* throughout Britain and Western Europe, throughout the medieval period. Did the Roman also bequeath us the Christianity itself? This is controversial because there have been historians who

thought that the religion more or less died out in England during the early Saxon period; but Patrick Wormald at least had a different opinion:

> One undoubted legacy from Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England was, Christianity. For the most part, the legacy was indirect, through Ireland, which Patrick and his fellow Britons converted, although it seems increasingly possible that Christianity survived at least in parts of pagan England. (*London Review of Books*, review of books by Salway and Todd, 19 November 1981).

Thirdly, and contrary to popular belief, Roman law remained an important influence in Britain, and even in England, notwithstanding the growth of the English common law in the medieval period, and the importance of Parliamentary legislation in modern times. During the Anglo-Saxon period Church law was permeated by it, and it provided a model for some of the law codes often thought to be purely Germanic.

Fourthly, the Anglo-Saxons inherited the Roman claim to the Island of Britain, though (like the Romans) they never occupied the whole of it. Writing in the 8th century, Bede mentions those Anglo-Saxon kings who had asserted the right to be called 'Bretwalda': they were Ælle of Sussex (488 – c. 514); Ceawlin of Wessex (560–592, died 593); Æthelbert of Kent (590–616); Rædwald of East Anglia (c. 600 – c. 624); Edwin of Deira (616–633); Oswald of Northumbria (633–642); and Oswiu of Northumbria (642–670), and the list was expanded by the writers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in Wessex, who added their own King Egbert (ruler of Wessex, 802-839).

The meaning of the term 'Brewalda' is obscure: itt might have meant 'ruler of Britain', or more simply 'wide ruler'; but Wormald inclined to the former interpretation, pointing out that (according to Bede) King Edwin of Northumbria claimed to rule over parts of the British Isles which lay entirely outside the areas occupied by the Anglo-Saxon. In addition the title passed, over the course of the centuries, from kings who ruled in the East of England to those who ruled in the North and the West – areas where the Anglo-Saxons were expanding at the expense of the native Britons. This confusion between Britain as a political entity and Britain as a geographical term lies at the heart of much of English history.

In conclusion, there are many benefits which the Roman Empire bequeathed to the English, indeed to western Europe as a whole, and these included civilisation and the rule of law; but they did not include liberty, for which we had to look to other models. The heroes of Miss Marshall's history are not the Antonine Emperors, but the British leaders Caractacus and Boadicea, and it is Boadicea (rather, for example, than the Emperor Hadrian) who has a statue on the Thames, erected in 1902, and close by the Houses of Parliament. The last word must therefore go to Tacitus, who put his famous denunciation of his own fellow Romans into the mouth of Calgacus, a resistance fighter at the Battle of Mons Graupius (84 C.E.):

Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the deep. If the enemy be rich, they are rapacious; if he be poor, they lust for dominion; neither the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a desert and call it peace.

CHAPTER TWO
HUGH GAITSKELL & THE ANGLO-SAXONS

> The end of Britain as an independent European state. I make no apology for repeating it. It means the end of a thousand years of history.
>
> Hugh Gaitskell, 1962

Not many people will remember Hugh Gaitskell (1906-1963), leader of the Labour Party in the 1950s and early 60s. In a speech to the party conference in October 1962, Gaitskell claimed that Britain's participation in a Federal Europe would mean "the end of Britain as an independent European state, the end of a thousand years of history!" He added: "You may say, all right! Let it end! But, my goodness, it's a decision that needs a little care and thought." He summoned up the memory of Vimy Ridge and Gallipoli, where Canadian and ANZAC troops had fought alongside the British. The speech dismayed many of Gaitskell's natural supporters but was applauded by many on the Left, causing his wife Dora to observe "all the wrong people are cheering".

Gaitskell's ringing reminder that 'we' had a long history, before we ever joined the EEC, was entirely understandable; but, with respect to a brilliant and learned man, it was also a very partial view. First of all, he used an ambiguous term when he referred to 'Britain'. Britain has not enjoyed a thousand years of history as a political entity or nation state. The political entity in question in 1962 was the United Kingdom, which has only existed since 1707. Further, the kingdoms of England and Scotland might be said to have existed since 962; but this was not true of Wales or Ireland. Far from it; there was never a kingdom of Wales, and there was only an (English) Kingdom of Ireland because Henry VIII proclaimed himself king in 1540.

Secondly, the subtext of Gaitskell's speech was that the thousand years had been more or less continuous, whatever changes there may have been in the constitution; but, even if we confine ourselves to England, we have known several

successful invasions, many wars (including civil) and even several revolutions. We have known long periods of continuity; but we have also experienced radical change. Sometimes the change was violent. In medieval times, the English had a reputation (at least in France) for killing their kings; and when one looks back on it, they had a point. Edward II, Richard II and Henry VI were all deposed, and died soon afterwards in mysterious circumstances. In 1649, the English executed Charles I; and in 1688, they deposed James II. This kind of thing never happened in France, prior to 1789; and yet we English usually think of the French as a much more turbulent people.

There was no crisis in English history quite like the one which occurred in 1066; and yet there has long been an intense debate about it, and what it meant. Before considering the views of the protagonists, it should be remembered that the 'Anglo-Saxons' did not refer to themselves as such. From the late 9th century onwards - in other words, for some 200 years prior to the Norman Conquest – they called themselves English and referred to their country as England.

The debate

The debate about the Conquest is far older than Sellars and Yeatman's riotous *1066 and All That*, which was published in 1930. Were the Normans ruthless militarists, who extinguished an older and more sophisticated culture, or proto-Renaissance scholars who gave England a new lease of life?

The clash of opinion amongst modern historians is but an echo of the even more profound differences to be found in the chronicles and histories written at the time. At the end of the entry for 1066 in the 'D' version of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, the writer tells us that William the Conqueror *promised that he would be a gracious liege lord, and yet [his Norman followers] ravaged all that they overran*. Again, William claimed that he would *rule all his people as well as the best of the kings before him*; but in the event he *laid taxes on people very severely*. When he went back to Normandy his henchmen *stayed behind and built castles here far and wide throughout this country, and distressed the wretched folk, and always after that it grew much worse*. The 'E' version of the same chronicle for 1087 – the year of the Conqueror's death - praises the king for his wisdom and piety but tells us that *he was a very stern and violent man*. This had its upside in that it enabled *any honest man to travel over his kingdom without injury with his bosom full of gold* and ensured that *if any man had intercourse with a woman against her will, he was forthwith castrated*; but the downside was that Englishmen were oppressed, by the building of castles and extraordinarily harsh new game laws. Poor men lamented and powerful men complained; but William paid no attention. Every man had to do the king's bidding *if he wished to live or hold his land*. The English monk Eadmer (c.1060-c.1126) regarded the Norman Conquest as a tragedy.

On the other hand, the earliest Norman writers on the subject pointed out that William had a good claim to the Engish throne and that Harold Godwinson had sworn fealty to Duke William during a visit to Normandy. Moreover the Pope had lent his support to the Norman expedition to England. For Ordericus Vitalis, who was English by birth but became a monk in Normandy and wrote his *Ecclesiastical History* between 1125 and 1141, William the Conqueror was a man who *during his whole life had followed the advice of wise counsellors, feared God… and been the unwearied protector of holy mother Church*; and in Orderic's view, William *maintained his excellent reputation to the end*.

After 1066, there was even a view that the Anglo-Saxon nobility 'had it coming'. William of Malmesbury, whose father was Norman, wrote his *Deeds of the Kings of the English* in the 1120s. According to him, moral standards had declined steeply in England in the years before the Conquest, which had brought about a real religious revival. The Normans were praised for their *economy in large houses*, their taste in dress, their delicacy when it came to food, their hardiness and prowess in war, their politeness and the protection they afforded to their subjects. Though he also condemned their readiness to resort to guile and bribery when they failed to get their way by force, he was harder on the Anglo-Saxons: their priests had been ignorant, their monks had consistently disregarded the Benedictine Rule, and they had given themselves up to *luxury and wantonness*. They had even been guilty of robbery and of selling pregnant servants into prostitution and slavery. Above all, *drinking parties had been a universal English custom, in which they passed entire days and nights*. It was binge-drinking which had condemned the Anglo-Saxons to ignominious defeat at Hastings.

Yet there have always been those who thought that the Normans had nothing to teach the Anglo-Saxons. This view became popular in England in the 1640s, during the English Civil War; and it was also the view taken by the Victorians J.M.Kemble, Bishop Stubbs and E.A.Freeman. In the 20th century James Campbell and Patrick Wormald both wrote that late Anglo-Saxon England was a nation state, with 'an effective monarchy, uniform institutions, a national language, a national Church, clear frontiers and a strong sense of national identity.' It was also a state with a long and distinguished history, overthrown by men who were essentially *parvenus* in the civilised world. Campbell (1935-2016) gave a couple of examples of the way in which the Anglo-Saxons had a strong sense of national identity:

> This spirit of national unity can be seen, for example, in the way in which the ealdorman Ethelweard, in his Latin version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, c.* 982, consistently uses *Anglii,* [and] *Anglia* for the English and England, to the extent of calling the West Saxons the West Angles. A comparable indication is that the saints of the formerly independent kingdoms were pooled as national saints. Thus the bodies of famous Northumbrian holy men were moved to Gloucester, Glastonbury or Canterbury (Campbell, *Anglo-Saxon State*).

By 1066, the Anglo-Saxons had been in England for some 600 years. When they first began to settle here in the 5th century, they were pagan barbarians, but by the Age of Bede (c. 673-735) they had become Christian, and indeed were in the forefront of Western culture in terms of learning and manuscript illumination; English missionaries played a critical role in converting the pagans of Germany in the 8th century. Unfortunately for what remained of Roman civilisation, Western Europe was battered by Muslim Saracens and pagan Vikings and Hungarians in the 9th and 10th centuries. The first and the third wave of invaders did not trouble the British Isles or Ireland; but it was quite otherwise with the Scandinavian Vikings, who arrived by sea. The Swedes went eastwards, settling coastal areas around the Baltic and travelling along the great rivers of Russia, to Staraya Ladoga, Novgorod, Kiev and Constantinople. The Norwegians travelled to the Faroes, Shetland, the Orkneys and Hebrides, the far North of Scotland, Iceland, Greenand and North America, but also Yorkshire, Cumberland and Ireland. The Danes raided widely in the North-West of England, West Francia and even the Moslem world. All three kinds of Viking held Christendom and Christianity in contempt, at this date.

In Francia, the successors of Charlemagne paid the Danes to go away but they always seemed to come back; and they certainly started to settle, around the mouths of the Seine and the Loire. In 911 the leader of one Viking war-band named Rollo (or something similar), agreed to do homage to the Frankish King Charles the Simple, and became his vassal for lands in what we now call 'Normandy' (the land of the Northmen). By the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, Rollo was recognised as Duke of that province. In addition, he agreed to be baptized as a Christian and married Charles's illegitimate daughter.

Alfred the Great

In the 1970s and '80s it became widely accepted that the Vikings were not as numerous, or barbarous or destructive, as they had once been thought to be; and this impression was powerfully reinforced by the result of excavations, showed for example) that York was a thriving port in the 10th century. But the idea that the Vikings were little more than friendly traders would have come as news to the greatest rulers of Anglo-Saxon England, Alfred the Great (871-899) and Athelstan (924-939). As Eric John pointed out, the Danes came to settle, rather than simply raiding and trading. This meant that they took control of the land, which in turn meant that the native population was (to a greater or lesser extent) dispossessed, if not murdered and driven out.

Alfred is now known as 'Alfred the Great'. He is one of only two Kings of England to have been give that name (the other being Canute or Knut, who was Danish); but Alfred only achieved that distinction in the 16th century, around 700

years after his death. This would seem to show that the criteria for it are somewhat arbitrary. Yet English historians of all persuasions take the view that Alfred fully deserved his fame in purely English terms, rather than because of any comparison with Charles the Great (r. as Emperor 800-814 C.E.) or Otto the Great (r. as Emperor 962-973 C.E.). The question is why?

Father Lingard explained that what made Alfred special was that he was not only a successful war-leader, who managed to preserve the freedom of his country at a time of great danger, but 'also the patron of the arts and the legislator of his people'. In addition, Alfred reformed the army, built over thirty fortified towns, founded the Royal Navy, created a united state with London as its capital, enacted a comprehensive law code, wrote several outstanding works of literature, promoted [Old] English as a language of government as well as literature, re-organised local government, and re-founded numerous monasteries.

What makes Lingard's view especially interesting is that he (a Roman Catholic) admired Alfred the Great as much as the Protestant historians of the 19th century, with whom he had little else in common. The explanation is that Alfred could do no wrong, from either point of view. He was an ardent Roman Catholic, but at a time when the only realistic alternative was Nordic paganism, abhorrent to all Christians. In E.A.Freeman's opinion Alfred 'was the most perfect character in history'.

There are legends about Alfred which have become part of folklore as well as history, for example the story of how he learned to read, how he burned the cakes, and how he once acted as his own spy. In Miss Marshall's version (1905):

Alfred the spy

> [Alfred] dressed himself like a minstrel or singer, and taking his harp, he went to the Danish camp. There he began to play upon his harp and to sing the songs he had learned when he was a boy. The Danes were a fierce, wild people, yet they loved music and poetry. They were delighted with Alfred's songs, and he was allowed to wander through the camp wherever he liked. Alfred [was] all the time watching and listening. He found out how many Danes there were, and where the camp was strong and where it was weak. He listened to the king as he talked to his captains and, when he had found out everything he could, he slipped quietly away.

Miss Marshall told her readers, correctly, that Alfred was King of Wessex and not King of England. She did however make the usual Edwardian mistake of confusing England and Britain, by crediting Alfred with the foundation of the Royal Navy. Her conclusion was the same as Freeman's:

> Alfred was good, and wise and kind. There never was a better king in England. He had to fight many battles, and war is terrible and cruel, but he

> did not fight for love of conquering, as other kings did. He fought only to save his country and his people. We never hear of him doing one unjust or unkind act.He was truthful and fearless in everything. It is no wonder, then, that we call him Alfred the Great, Alfred the Truthteller, England's Darling."

Did Alfred deserve all this adulation? Since it was earned, first and foremost, on the battlefield, it is worth pointing out that the various English kingdoms which existed in the early 9th century were almost all destroyed by the three Danish invasions which took place between 865-9 C.E., 870-8 and 892-6. These were led by men of royal or semi-royal status and involved much larger numbers of men than previous raids (which had begun as early as 793). During the first and second of them the Vikings conquered Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia, and attacked Wessex en masse on three occasions. They also attacked the centres of ecclesiastical and secular government wherever they went and murdered Edmund (subsequently St Edmund), King of the East Angles, killed two rival kings of Northumbria and forced one King of Mercia into retirement in Rome. During the third invasion, they marched the length and breadth of England and even invaded Wales. Although these new invaders did not penetrate Wessex after 893, her coasts were raided by fleets manned by Danes who had already settled in Northumbria and East Anglia.

It gets worse, before it gets better: it seems that two of the Anglo-Saxon kings killed by the Vikings may have been sacrificed to the Norse equivalent of Woden in a spectacularly horrible way:

> The 'blood-eagle' involved ripping the victim's lungs out of his ribcage, and draping them across his shoulders like an eagle's folded wings. (Patrick Wormald, in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell).

During Alfred's reign, then, Christian Wessex was repeatedly attacked by a formidable and ferociously heathen enemy. All the other English kingdoms were defeated and occupied, but Alfred held out, indeed he counterattacked, and in 886 he occupied London, after which it is said that 'all the English people submitted to him'. This was a significant achievement, given that the Mercians and West Saxons had been bitter enemies only a few years before. At the same time it needs to be remembered that Alfred's success was limited. He may have been recognised as king, but his power did not actively extend into Mercia, let alone into East Anglia or Northumbria, while Cornwall still retained its independence.

Alfred's leadership during the long wars was undoubtedly crucial. His reform of the Army, his building of fortified towns, and his use of sea-power were original and important, but we probably need to add the less tangible element of his example, and the inspiration it gave to his people. The parallel of Winston Churchill in 1940 comes to mind, though it is more difficult to identify Alfred's 'finest hour'.

The comparison with Churchill is apt in other ways. Churchill was a winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and once said that he would make sure that his

name lived on because he would write the history! King Alfred was also a literary figure. Traditionally the author of several books himself, he almost certainly sponsored the Wessex version of the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* around 892 C.E., and commissioned Bishop Asser's *Life of Alfred* the following year. Since these are virtually the only literary sources which survive from a 'dark age' (made darker by the Viking destruction of monastic libraries), it is hardly surprising that the portrait of Alfred which emerges is a flattering one. But we need to be cautious about accepting everything which the Chronicle and Bishop Asser tell us about Alfred (just as we sometimes need to take Churchill's account of the Second World War with a pinch of salt). James Campbell warned that 'Asser's adulation of Alfred was unrelenting, and it echoes through the text-books yet.'

Patrick Wormald pointed out that we should try to see Alfred in an all-England context (despite the absence of non-Wessex sources) and that the European context was of huge significance. Alfred was no 'little Englander'. He went to Rome twice as a boy (on the second occasion for a period of about two years); and although he is famous for encouraging the use of English, his reliance on Carlolingian precedent for his law code and his love of Latin and Latin works on Christian philosophy is well documented. On a person level, there were many links between Alfred's court and the Carolingian (the term used for the rulers who succeeded Charlemagne, King of the Franks and Holy Roman Emperor). In other words, we should be slow to see Alfred as evidence for English exceptionalism, especially if we set him alongside Brian Boru, High King of Ireland (941-1014), who was Arthur and Alfred rolled into one.

Athelstan

By contrast with his grandfather Alfred, Athelstan is a much neglected figure, though he was King of Wessex and Mercia from 924 to 927 and King of England the English from 927 to 939. H.E.Marshall mentions him only once, in passing:

> When Edward the Elder and Ethelfleda both died, Edward's son, Athelstane, came to the throne. He, too, was a good king, and he, too, had to fight with the Danes.

At the same time, Miss Marshall did set Athelstan's reign in the right context, which was the fresh wave of Viking invasions which hit these Islands after the brief respite enjoyed in the 890s in Wessex. This time, the Scandinavians came from Norway rather than Denmark, sweeping over the North-West and (as the DNA has now confirmed), altering the racial composition of Cumbria and Westmorland permanently. In 919 a Norse-Irish Viking dynasty seized York and held it for the

best part of half a century. Athelstan's reign must be seen against the background of a renewed threat to the very existence of the infant Kingdom of England.

A medieval Christian monarch was expected, first and foremost, to defend his people and to defend Christianity; but it helped to boost his popularity if he was a wise and impartial judge and law-giver. It is therefore interesting that more legal texts survive from Æthelstan's reign than from any other tenth-century English king. The two earliest codes were concerned with the Church. The first asserts the importance of paying tithes. The second enforces the duty of charity. The later law codes show the King's concern with threats to social order, especially robbery, which Athelstan regarded as the most important manifestation of social breakdown. Indeed his preoccupation with theft has invited the comment that he was 'tough on theft, and tough on the causes of theft'. Wormald wrote that "The legislative activity of Æthelstan's reign has rightly been dubbed 'feverish'... But the extant results are, frankly, a mess"; but then Patrick's view was that the Anglo-Saxons did not primarily promulgate law codes in order to legislate, in the modern sense, but to make it known to their subjects what their duties were.

Law was not the only area where Athelstan made an impact. Æthelstan built on his grandfather Alfred's efforts to revive ecclesiastical scholarship and he also gave generously to churches and monasteries, as well founding new ones. Above all his military victories enabled him to assume a new role in Anglo-Saxon England and indeed in these Islands, by conquering the new Viking kingdom of York in 927. At Eamont in the Lake District, Athelstan's supremacy was recognised by King Constantine of Alba in Scotland, King Hywel Dda of Deheubarth in Wales, Ealdred of Bamburgh, and King Owain of Strathclyde. Athelstan was therefore a new 'Bretwalda' in more than name.

Athelstan made his kingship good by travelling a good deal around his new kingdom – according to charters, he visited Nottingham, Tamworth and Whittlebury (near Northampton) – all of which had at one time been under the Danes - as well as Colchester, London and Exeter. After the meeting at Eamont, he summoned the Welsh kings to Hereford, imposed a heavy annual tribute on them and fixed the border between England and Wales in the Hereford area at the River Wye. Thereafter Welsh kings attended Æthelstan's court between 928 and 935 and witnessed his charters. The alliance produced peace between Wales and England, and within Wales, throughout Æthelstan's reign, though some Welsh resented the inferior status of their rulers, and the obligation to pay tribute.

According to William of Malmesbury, it was after the Hereford meeting that Æthelstan went on to expel the Cornish from Exeter, fortify its walls, and fix the Cornish boundary at the River Tamar; but meanwhile, relations between Athelstan and the Scots king Constantine had broken down. Further fighting resulted in a meeting at Cirencester in 935 which Michael Wood has characterised as a 'Durbar'. This makes an apparently anachronistic comparison between Athelstan's informal 'Empire' in Britain in the mid 10th century and the British Empire in India over 1,000 years later; but it possibly does tell us something about the nature of Anglo-Saxon

relations with those who attended. There were five Celtic kings there: Constantine of Alba, Owain of Cumbria, and the Welshmen Howel, Idwal and Morgan. (Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages*).

Beneath the ceremonial veneer, there was seething resentment of English hegemony; and Constantine organised a grand coalition of Athelstan's opponents – his own Scots, Norse Vikings from Dublin and the 'Welsh' (or Britons) of Strathclyde, but also some Gaels from Ireland, Northumbrian rebels and Icelanders – and marched South, where they were defeated at Brunanburh, somewhere in England, in 937.

What were the Coalition's objectives? In his history of Wales, Gwynfor Evans was in no doubt that the hot-heads wanted to drive the Angles and Saxons back into the sea, whence they had come 500 years before:

> The *Armes Prydain* the greatest 'prophetic' poem in our language, was composed about 930, a poetic composition which conveys the bitter enmity towards the English which burned in the hearts of some of the Welsh. This long exciting poem is founded on the belief that the Welsh have a right to the land of England: that the whole of Britain is really their land. With consuming passion the poet appeals to the memory of the heroes of the magnificent past. The princes advance Arthur at their head, to lead the nation on a crusade. The Celts are called upon to unite - the Welsh with the Men of the Old North as well as the Irish, the Bretons with the men of Cornwall - to hurl the English into the sea.

At the same time, Evans is at pains to point out that his hero Hywel Dda, did not fall for 'this silly dream'.

It is interesting that Neil Oliver essentially concurs with English historians about the importance of the Battle of Brunanburh, though he points out that, while Constantine failed to drive the English out of England, Athelstan had failed to drive the Scots out Scotland:

> Everyone has heard of Hastings, of 1066. But who has heard of Brunanburh? And yet this more than anything that happened in Sussex a century and more later was what determined the shape of the Britain we live in today… Brunanburh was a showdown between two very different ethnic identities: a Norse/Celtic alliance versus an Anglo-Saxon one. It aimed to settle, once and for all, whether Britain would be controlled by a single 'imperial' power, or remain several, separate independent kingdoms. Brunanburh represented a split in perceptions which, like it or not, is still with us today.

The English *Nakba*?

In the end, it is a question of perspective; but there seems little doubt as to what the Anglo-Saxons thought about the Norman Conquest in 1066, or 1087, or 1100: it was their equivalent of the *Nakba* – the catastrophe, which saw 700,000 Palestinians driven from their homes in 1948. The numbers of Englishmen who were killed, expropriated, or driven into exile, during the reign of William the Conqueror was far smaller; but it was nonetheless substantial.

In the years which followed, William spent much of his time putting down rebellions, which only diminished after Edgar the Aetheling (grandson of Edmund Ironside) surrendered in 1074. In 1067 rebels in Kent launched an attack on Dover Castle, while Eadric the Wild raised a revolt in Western Mercia in alliance with the Welsh rulers of Gwynedd and Powys. In 1068 there was a rising in Exeter, two in Mercia and a fourth in Northumbria. Meanwhile the late King Harold's sons raided the South-West from the sea. Early in 1069 there was another rebellion in Northumbria. The rebels besieged York, a large fleet sent by Sweyn II of Denmark arrived later in the year and the Danes joined forces with a second rising in the North, which defeated the Norman garrison at York and took control of Northumbria. There was renewed resistance in western Mercia, and in the south-west, rebels again attacked Exeter. In 1070 Sweyn renounced an earlier agreement with William and sent forces to join English rebels led by Hereward the Wake in the 'Isle' of Ely. (Surprisingly, for someone who has gone down in English history as a patriotic hero, Hereward welcomed yet another attempted Danish invasion). The Fenland rebels, protected by the marshes, engaged in further hostilities in 1071.

William the Bastard, soon to be known as the Conqueror, crushed all these risings, displaying a ruthlessness which was remarked upon even by the Norman chroniclers. The so-called Harrying (or Harrowing) of the North in 1069 was so brutal that its effects were still in evidence when the royal commissioners compiled Domesday Book 20 years later. The scale of English resistance was played down by the Norman chroniclers, and has often been underestimated by historians.

The Normans and their allies were few in number – around 8,000 compared to a native population of about 2,000,000. Moreover, they expected to be rewarded with land and titles in return for their service during the invasion, and in the putting down of these numerous rebellions. A certain degree of ruthlessness was therefore to be expected from the Conqueror, and the eventual outcome was the almost complete replacement of Anglo-Saxon lords with Normans. William not only expropriated the rebels, he also established a kind of centralised feudalism, whereby all land was held directly from the king in return for military service. The 'fee' or 'estate' has formed the basis of English land law ever since.

The Conquest itself made William both rich and powerful – far more than he had been before. The Old English state was relatively wealthy and the Conqueror

had almost unrestricted access to that wealth. He was able to reward his followers handsomely, build castles on an unprecedented scale and hire mercenaries when necessary. In 1070 he even imposed military obligations for the first time on English bishops and abbots. Monarchy, Church and State were all transformed. Anglo-Saxons were removed from high governmental and ecclesiastical office. After 1075 all earldoms were held by Normans, and Englishmen were only occasionally appointed as sheriffs. Senior English office-holders were either expelled from their positions in the Church, or kept in place for their lifetimes and replaced by foreigners when they died. By 1096 no bishopric was held by any Englishman, and English abbots became uncommon, especially in the larger monasteries.

Many Anglo-Saxons, including groups of nobles, fled the country for Scotland, Ireland, or Scandinavia. The largest single exodus occurred in the 1070s, when a fleet of 235 ships sailed for Constantinople. Englishmen became an important element in the elite Varangian Guard, part of the Byzantine army which fought Robert Guiscard, Norman conqueror of Southern Italy, at Durazzo in 1081. According to French and Icelandic sources, some of these English exiles were rewarded with a gift of land, possibly in the Crimea, where they had towns named after London, York and other places which reminded them of home.

For those who remained in England, the French spoken by the conquerors became the official language for a period of 300 years; and, when English re-emerged, it was no longer Anglo-Saxon but Middle English. The law discriminated against the subject people both directly and indirectly. The *murdrum* fine provided that, if a Norman was killed and the killer was not apprehended within five days, the hundred within which the crime was committed should be collective punished. (An Anglo-Saxon enjoyed no such protection). At the same time, new forests established for the benefit of the Normans made the English who presumed to hunt outlaws in their own land. Inhabitants of the forest were forbidden to bear hunting weapons, and dogs were banned from the forest (though mastiffs were permitted as watchdogs if they had their front claws removed).

Domesday Book demonstrates the virtual extinction of the old Anglo-Saxon nobility. By the end of William's reign there were less than half a dozen of the 180 greater lords who were English. Of 1,000 tenants in chief, there were only 13 Englishmen left. This tiny residue was further diminished in the decades that followed, the elimination of native landholding being most complete in the southern parts of the country. In many ways the Conquest was a catastrophe for the whole English nation. The Normans moved the principal seats of several English bishops, while the new incumbents called their predecessors 'rustics' and 'illiterates'. They tore down old and venerated cathedrals and shrines. There was a kind of 'cultural revolution', the extent of which is hidden from us, because the Normans appropriated literacy and literature, substituting French and Latin for Anglo-Saxon. In the golden age of the monastic chronicle, the chroniclers were predominantly Norman or Anglo-Norman monks.

On the other hand, Professor le Patrourel tells us that 'slavery died out in England after the Norman Conquest'. By contrast, it had been a normal feature of society in Anglo-Scandinavian England, where slave-trading had been indulged in by Viking and Saxon alike. There is a sermon of Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester (c.1008-1095) in which he lambasts the Englishmen who

> club together to buy a woman between them as a joint purchase, and practise foul sin with that one woman, one after another, just like dogs, who do not care about filth; and then sell God's creature for a price out of the country into the power of strangers (Marc Morris).

Marc Morris also cites William of Malmsebury (c.1095-1143), who condemned the merchants of Bristol. Like their descendants who made huge profits from the African slave trade, these men:

> Would buy up people from all over England and sell them off to Ireland in the hope of profit, and put up for sale maidservants, after toying with them in bed, making them pregnant. You would have groaned to see the files of the wretches of people roped together, young persons of both sexes whose beautiful appearance and youthful innocence might move barbarians to pity, being put up for sale every day.

Of necessity modern fans of Anglo-Saxon England look back from 1066 on 600 years of English history. The advocates of the Normans can fast-forward from 1066 to the strength of the Anglo-Norman monarchy, the legal reforms of Henry II, and the achievements of the 12th century Renaissance; but, if we stop the clock for a moment, what would an Anglo-Saxon, living in exile in New York at the end of the 11th, have thought of 'the Norman achievement?' What would the famed continuity of English law mean to his countryman who had remained at home, when the landowners, judges and sheriffs were now overwhelmingly French? And what would the men who stood in the shield wall with Harold, and went down fighting, have thought about it all? I am not the first to wonder. According to the late John Burrow, the parallel between Harold Godwinson and the last Emperor of Byzantium, who was killed while defending Constantinople from the Ottoman Turk, was constantly on the mind of E.A.Freeman, author of a *The History of the Norman Conquest* (1867-76).

We have traditionally found consolation for the disaster of the Norman Conquest, and all that flowed from it, in the idea that the immigrants were soon assimilated. This comforting thought is largely based on a single statement made by Richard Fitzneal in his treatise *The Dialogue of the Exchequer*, written in the late 12th century:

> with the English and Normans dwel1ing together and alternately marrying and giving in marriage, the races have become so fused that it can scarcely be discerned at the present day - I speak of freemen alone-who is English and who is Norman by race, I except, however, the bondmen, who are called villeins, and are not permitted, if their lords object, to change their status.

However, when Professor le Patourel examined the extent of intermarriage between Normans and English, he could find very little evidence to support it. Instead, he found that, by and large, the Norman aristocracy which came over with Duke William 'tended to marry wthin their own ranks', and likewise, there was little evidence of intermarriage in English towns. In addition, 'at the level of the men who tilled the soil and those who kept the flocks and herds', there was probably 'no intermingling of any consequence at all.' Finally, any intermarriage which did take place was likely to have been between 'the luckier survivors of the English landed families and the second or third ranks of the Norman baronage'. So there is little for the Englishman's comfort here, after all.

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN MAJOR
& THE HEART OF EUROPE

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> Two years ago I said I wanted to put Britain at the heart of Europe. And the heart of Europe is where I still want us to be.
>
> John Major, 1993

In case you have forgotten, or weren't around, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990 and John Major took over the job between 1990 and 1997. Both were Conservatives, and both won general elections and were popular in their time. They each wanted the UK to be at the heart of Europe, although what they meant by that is open to debate and has been the subject of bitter division within the Conservative Party.

Bruges, 1988

At one time - before it experienced its own catastrophic recession and became known as *Bruges la morte* - the city of Bruges was at the heart of the Northern Renaissance; and (as Mrs Thatcher pointed out) it was also where the first book printed in the English language was produced, by William Caxton. Geoffrey Chaucer had been a frequent visitor to the city a century before that. In 1988, Mrs Thatcher addressed the College of Europe there, and chose to sound a warning about the direction in which the European Community (as it then was) was heading; but it is important to look at what she also said in praise of the Community, because she certainly did not talk about leaving. Yet, not long afterwards the Bruges Group was founded to promote Eurosceptic ideas and activities; and it is generally considered that this was the moment when the Conservatives and others started to travel the road which ultimately led to the Referendum of June 2016.

There was quite a lot in the speech which was indeed 'Eurosceptic': for example:

> I am the first to say that on many great issues the countries of Europe should try to speak with a single voice…I want to see us work more closely on the things we can do better together than alone…Europe is stronger when we do so, whether it be in trade, in defence or in our relations with the rest of the world…But working more closely together does not require power to be centralised in Brussels or decisions to be taken by an appointed bureaucracy.

But Mrs Thatcher also said:

> Let us have a Europe which plays its full part in the wider world, which looks outward not inward, and which preserves that Atlantic community—that Europe on both sides of the Atlantic—which is our noblest inheritance and our greatest strength… [but] let me be quite clear….Britain does not dream of some cosy, isolated existence on the fringes of the European Community. Our destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community.

On a March day in 1991 in Southport (a seaside town, not at the heart of anything much) John Major famously told a meeting of Conservatives that he wanted them to feel warm about the E.C. (as it still was):

> It is because we care for lasting principles that I want to place Britain at the heart of Europe. Partnership in Europe will never mean passive acceptance of all that is put to us. No-one should fear we will lose our national identity. We will fight for Britain's interest as hard as any Government that has gone before. But, not from the outside, where we would lose. From the inside where we will win.

Clearly, the Prime Minister was already apologising for his espousal of what, as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, was shortly to become the European Union; and was already fighting a losing battle for the heart and soul of his own party. In July 1993, he was memorably rude about three of his Cabinet colleagues (Michael Howard, Peter Lilley and Michael Portillo), when he called them 'bastards' for opposing his attitude to Europe; but in the meantime, in April of that year, he had repeated his own enthusiasm for the EU:

> Two years ago I said I wanted to put Britain at the heart of Europe. And the heart of Europe is where I still want us to be. It is now 20 years since we joined the European Community.Since then, a whole generation has grown up. A generation free of the legacy of the old animosities. A generation which takes for granted co-operation between the Member States. Today, we go to

> France much as we might go to Yorkshire. Last year we made a trifling 24 million trips to Europe. Little England steps out. But as we have been stepping out for more than 20 years now we hardly notice that we do it.

Major dealt with many of the criticisms which the Eurosceptics of his day levelled against the E.C., including the criticism that we paid too much into its coffers. He did so by reference to his predecessor Sir Edward Heath's part in the history of Ancient Rome:

> Only a cloud-borne idealist would deny the debits to our membership. We joined late. We didn't make the rules. A lot of them didn't suit us. There is a legend of ancient Rome to illustrate the British predicament. It tells how the Sibyl offered the Roman Senate 9 books containing the future of the republic. Shocked at the price, the senators refused to buy them. The Sibyl burned 3 books. She then offered the other 6 for the same price. The Senate still refused. She burned 3 more. Seriously rattled, the Senate hastily agreed to buy the last 3 books for the price of the original 9.
>
> Ted, you bought the books. We have read them; and thank goodness you did buy them.

Finally, as to the idea that we should quit the EU altogether:

> To opt out of that struggle would deny 20 years of British effort and achievement. How does the Community work? Europe is a small sea of perpetual negotiation. It shapes its future and its laws by alliances between governments and ministers.

At the Heart of Europe?

In rejecting the UK's application for membership of the EC in 1963 the French President, General de Gaulle said:

> England in effect is insular, she is maritime, she is linked through her exchanges, her markets, her supply lines to the most diverse and often the most distant countries; she pursues essentially industrial and commercial activities, and only slight agricultural ones. She has in all her doings very marked and very original habits and traditions.

There are some who say, now, that de Gaulle was right; and would doubtless argue that it was almost inevitable that, having joined the EC in 1973, the UK would eventually leave (although there was no formal mechanism for leaving until the

Treaty of Lisbon was signed in 2007). But was the French President right to say what he did? Notice in the first place that he spoke about England, not Britain, let alone the Republic of Ireland, which eventually joined the EC at the same time as the UK; but also that he spoke about England as if she had always been the same and was incapable of change.

England is not an island, and she has not always been 'insular', or 'linked to the most distant countries'. During the period 1066 to 1277 the kingdom of England was most closely linked to the six territories which became France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands. These six were all part of Charlemagne's Empire in 800 CE and they eventually became the founding members of the EEC.

This had not always been the case. Unlike the Romans – who regarded Britain as a whole as being on the edge of the Mediterranean world - the Anglo-Saxons who settled in England from around 450 C.E. came from Northern Europe, and specifically from what we now call Germany, the Low Countries and Denmark. More importantly, they were pagans who converted to the Roman Catholic version of Christianity (rather than the Celtic version which at first won favour in Northumbria). After this event, the Anglo-Saxons looked to Rome, not only as the source of true religion, but as the fount of knowledge and the centre of civilisation. In the 8th century, while the Venerable Bede wrote his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* in Latin, St Boniface played a major role in converting the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire to Christianity, and Alcuin of York became a leading intellectual at the court of Charlemagne. Long before Alfred the Great supposedly burned his cakes, he travelled to Rome to visit Pope Leo IV.

It is true that the Kingdom of England remained apart from Europe, in the sense that it never became part of the revived Roman Empire created by Charlemagne or the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German nation' created by Otto the Great; but this was not because the English felt very different from other Western Europeans or subscribed to different values, but because England was for a time dragged against its will into the Scandinavian world. Everyone knows about the Norman Conquest of 1066; but few know about Guthrum's and Olaf Guthfrithson's and Eric Bloodaxe's and Cnut the Great's conquests of parts of England. The effect of this on English history and society has been downplayed by many historians, but it was profound. In fact, it is more correct to speak of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom as an Anglo-Scandinavian kingdom.

All this changed again in 1066. The Normans were not at all insular; and for at least two centuries after the Norman Conquest, English attentions were diverted to France at the political, military and religious levels, not least because the Kings of England were now Continental rulers too. The consequences were profound and longlasting. France at the time was not only the largest, most populous and richest kingdom in Western Europe, it was also the eldest 'daughter' of the Roman Church and the most influential, in political and religious terms. The Anglo-Norman and Angevin kings wished to pursue their ambitions there because in one sense they wanted to be at the heart of Europe.

If Rollo, the founder of the Duchy of Normandy was both a Viking and a pagan, his successors had become loyal devotees of the Pope; and they had also learned to speak French. In addition his war band must have intermarried and integrated with the local Frankish population to a remarkable extent, producing what was visibly 'a new aristocracy, a new Church, a new monasticism, and a new culture' by the beginning of the second millennium. The new Dukes of Normandy also took to French concepts of knighthood and feudal tenure. The extent of the transformation can be seen in the way in which the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers refer to the victors of Hastings as 'the French' rather than 'the Normans';

R. Allen Brown had no doubts about the effects of the Norman Conquest in England. He thought that it brought a new unity and dynamism, which enabled the country to enter into the mainstream of western Latin Christendom for the first time.

> The victory of William's knights over the Anglo-Danish housecarls and Saxon infantry symbolised not only a clash of cultures and military traditions but also the inevitable triumph of a brave new feudal European order over a retrospective and outmoded Anglo-Saxon state, a fossilized relic echoing the old Carolingian world order.

Brown even asked the question put by Thomas Carlyle 100 years previously: 'Without the Normans, what would England have been?' And he repeated Carlyle's answer:

> A gluttonous race of Jutes and Angles capable of no grand combinations, lumbering about in pot-bellied equanimity; not dreaming of heroic toil and silence and endurance such as leads to the high places of the Universe.

Whether we agree with James Campbell and Patrick Wormald, or with Thomas Carlyle and R. Allen Brown, it is undoubtedly true that the Normans re-orientated English interests and 'foreign policy' after 1066. Whereas the Anglo-Saxons of the period 800-1066 had been principally (though not exclusively) concerned with the Scandinavian threat, the chief focus of interest for the Anglo-Norman kings and their Angevin and Plantagenet successors, was to be France, and the noble and royal dominions there. This remained the case for the Anglo-Norman nobility until 1204, when those who owned fiefs on both sides of the Channel lost their fiefs in Normandy, unless they chose to go and live abroad; and for the monarchy until 1453 (when the last English armies were swept out of France).

Finally there was a major difference between between Anglo-Saxon England and Norman England with regard to the position of the kingdom in relation to these Islands. The Anglo-Saxons may have claimed hegemony in Britain but they did not try to conquer Wales or Scotland or Ireland, indeed - unlike the Romans, they failed to make serious inroads in either of the first two, while Celtic Cornwall was only incorporated into Wessex in the 10th century. On the other hand, the Normans

expanded in every direction: they began to create fiefs and plant settlers in South Wales and in Southern Scotland almost as soon as they gained control of England, and they did the same in Ireland in the 11th century.

During the 12th and 13th centuries the twin pillars of European civilisation were the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire (which, at its height, included what we now call Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and large parts of France). Neither the French nor the English kingdoms ever formed part of the Empire; but Richard of Cornwall (brother of King Henry III of England) tried to become Emperor and was elected King of the Romans in 1257, an office he retained until 1272. Meanwhile, France provided many a Pope, whereas only one Englishman was ever elected to the Holy See – Nicholas Breakspear, who ruled as Adrian IV between 1154 and 1159. This is not an impressivre contribution; but on the other hand England remained a largely enthusiastic daughter of the Roman Church throughout the entire medieval period.

England and France were both important military powers; and both countries shared the institutions, ideas and laws of feudalism and chivalry, including the branch of international law known as the law of arms. Knights from either side of the Channel participated in tournaments, and could even make war in alliance against a common enemy. Both countries participated enthusiastically in the early Crusades; and Richard the Lionhart of England and Philip II of France were joint leader of the Third Crusade (1189-92), which briefly re-captured Jerusalem for Christianity. The English also took part in the Northern Crusades in the Baltic, though these were led by the Teutonic Knights.

Throughout the medieval period, there was a common culture, shared by the upper echelons of society. English intellectuals played an important role in the new Universities, founded in Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. Englishmen were also significant figures in the explosion of new monastic orders in the 12th century and the spectacular growth of the Franciscan and Dominican friars in the 13th. These were pan-European movements; but, for example, the *Carta Caritatis*, which was a foundation document for the Cistercians, was drafted by the Englishman Stephen Harding, while the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon (c. 1220-c 1292), who became one of the leading European intellectuals, came from Somerset.

Michael Prestwich presented a convincing argument that the English court was cosmopolitan in the 13th century:

> Otto de Grandson, perhaps the most loyal of Edward I's councillors, was from Savoy. The master mason responsible for much of Henry III's rebuilding of Westminster Abbey, Henry of Rheims, was probably French. The magnificent castles built for Edward I in Wales were the work of Savoyard masons and craftsmen, headed by Master James of St George. The wars which Edward fought were in part financed by means of loans provided by Italian banking houses, notably the Riccardi of Lucca and the Frescobaldi of Florence. The Italian lawyer,

> Francesco Accursi, was among the king's advisers who contributed to the work of legal reform. (Prestwich, *Politics*).

Another aspect of this cosmopolitanism was the admiration which Henry III had for the French King Louis IX. It is probable that Henry was copying Louis when he introduced the practice of 'touching' his subjects to cure scrofula (known as 'the King's Evil'); and he was certainly doing that when he supervised the re-building of Westminster Abbey. The mid-13th century was even a time when England and France genuinely sought to make peace. By the Treaty of Paris of 1259 Henry acknowledged the loss of Maine, Anjou and Poitou, as well as the Duchy of Normandy (apart from the Channel Islands), while Louis IX of France agreed that Henry be recognised as Duke of Aquitaine. Modern historians seem to think that this Treaty contained the seeds of future wars; but it did secure peace for a generation time; and Louis IX even became so respected in England that he was asked to arbitrate in a dispute between Henry III and his Barons in 1264.

If the court was cosmopolitan, there is a wealth of evidence that the English people as a whole were not. Prestwich attributes this (in part) to the loss of Normandy to the French in 1204, which made English politics more insular. On the other hand, Henry III had Poitevin, Savoyard, and Lusignan favourites and relatives who became a focus for English antipathy towards foreign courtiers (and is even thought to have contributed to the outbreak of the Barons' War of 1264-67). Matthew Paris (c. 1200-1259), who was a Benedictine monk at St Albans, and must have encountered many travellers in his time, nevertheless disliked all foreigners, but especially Savoyards and Lusignans, papal appointees, foreign mercenaries, Italian bankers and Flemish merchants He repeatedly condemned 'the insatable greed of the Roman *curia*'; and wrote this about the Jews:

> Moreover it was said and discovered that coins were being circumcised by circumcised people and infidel Jews who, because of the heavy royal taxes, were reduced to begging. Other crimes, too, were said to have originated with them.

Matthew levelled the same prejudiced charge against the Flemings and the Cahorsins (men from Cahors in South-West France.

Ireland

The Normans' mastery of the techniques of warfare enabled them to expand, not just in Britain but in the South of Italy and Sicily, and (as a result of the Crusades) in the Holy Land as well. In 1170 Norman barons, led by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (known as 'Strongbow') invaded Ireland, while Henry II of England followed him the following year. This was the start of the 'English' conquest of a

large part of Ireland, which was to profoundly affect that country for the next 800 years. Some would say that it affects it still.

H.E.Marshall's children's history provided a simple view of the reasons for the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland:

> The Pope was angry with the Irish, because they would not pay him some money to which he thought he had a right. Henry [II] first sent some Norman knights over to Ireland, and then went himself. There was a good deal of fighting, but in the end Ireland was added to England, and ever since, the kings of England have been lords of Ireland too, although many years passed before they could be said really to rule there.

Essentially, we are told that Henry II invaded Ireland in order to take back control from the Barons who had gone there before him and established a de facto regime; but he needed a pretext, and this was obtained by means of a papal bull issued by the only English Pope, Adrian IV. The bull argued that the Irish were uncivilised. The argument is put in full by Gerald of Wales in his books about Ireland, in which he tells us that the Kings of Ireland did not achieve kingship 'by right of anointing or even of heredity or order of succession, but only by force and arms'; and the King of Ulster was inaugurated only after ritual sexual intercourse with a horse, which he then ate. Further Gerald thought:

> This is a filthy people, wallowing in vice. Of all peoples it is the least instructed in the rudiments of the Faith. They do not yet pay tithes or first fruits or contract marriages. They do not avoid incest. They do not attend God's church with true reverence. Moreover, men in many places in Ireland, I shall not say marry, but rather debauch, the wives of their dead brothers.

From a modern standpoint it is difficult to see this as anything other than propaganda, or 'fake news'. After all, it was hardly fair to condemn the Irish for being poor Christians when St Patrick's mission to Ireland pre-dated St Augustine's to England by over 100 years; and even Gerald of Wales himself came to the conclusion, after examining the Book of Kildare, an illuminated manuscript produced by Irish monks, that it was 'not the work of men but of angels'." (Jonathan Bardon). In addition, Geraldwas simply wrong to say that the Irish did not engage in agriculture.

But perhaps the best antidote to Gerald strident words is to be found in the work of the historian of *Sinn Fein*, P.S.O'Hegarty (1879-1955) who wrote after the Easter Rising of 1916 but before the Irish War of Independence. O'Hegarty's starting point in relation to Ireland was similar to Gwnfor Evans's in relation to Wales - there had long been an Irish nation, with its own language, its own religious practices and its own forms of government, which differed from those which were predominant in England and France, where there was a centralised monarchy and a centralised

Church. At the same time, O'Hegarty, like Gwynfor Evans after him, delighted in pointing out that there was time when the Irish were more doughty fighters than the English. Had they not, under Brian Boru been able to decisively defeat the Scandinavians in 1014, around the time when the Anglo-Saxon kingdom was overrun by Canute of Denmark?

In O'Hegarty's view, the Irish ought not to have been condemned to conquest and dismemberment, to satisfy the Pope and enrich the Normans and English; and the charges against them were spurious and false.

> The history of Ireland after the invasion is the history of an arrested development, the history of the struggle of two civilizations, one materialistic, commercial, strongly organized for aggression, believing in trade, and the other spiritual, loosely knit politically, and believing in liberty. The civilizations of Western Europe were feudal, all save one. The Irish civilization was federal, and the whole instinct of the people is federal rather than feudal. Their civilization was steeped in the theory of the preservation as fully as possible of the principle of liberty, liberty for the individual, for the clan, for the province.
>
> As for the English:
>
> These first English invaders of Ireland were of the very same stamp as those who come even in our own time. Through the generations the supply has kept steadily on, and the quality has never varied-adventurers, men with fortunes to make or mend, with everything to gain outside their own country, and nothing to lose but life, and to that they fought hard and dealt mercilessly. They had the one great quality of their times - they were brave; and the other qualities of their prototypes in all ages - they were unscrupulous, desperate and liars, shameless on points of honour, and keeping faith only at the sword's point.

Wales

The 13th century may have been a time when England co-operated with her Continental neighbour to an unprecedented degree; but it was also a tme when the English monarchs attempted to bring the Island of Britain under English control.

Wales was the first to receive the 'treatment'. William the Conqueror had established powerful lordships – and even autonomous palatinates – in the Marches of Wales, while Norman barons pushed along the south coast to Pembrokeshire, which eventually became 'Little England beyond Wales' because of the predominance of English-speaking settlers. However, it was Edward I of England (r. 1272-1307) who completed the conquest when he smashed his way into the north of Wales and surrounded Snowdonia with those 'state of the art' castles which are so

familiar to the tourist: Conway, Caernarvon, Harlech, and Beaumaris on Anglesey.

H.E.M.Marshall told the tale, as the English liked to hear it a century or more ago:

> When Edward came to the throne he sent for Llewellyn, Prince of Wales, to come to do homage; that is, to own him as over-lord. Llewellyn would not come. Six times did Edward send. Still Llewellyn refused. This made Edward very angry and, hearing that a beautiful lady was coming from France to be married to Llewellyn, he seized her and kept her prisoner in London. He then sent messengers to the Prince of Wales, telling him that he should have his bride when he had done homage, and not till then. Llewellyn, instead of submitting, was furiously angry. He raised an army and marched against Edward. But brave little Wales could not do much against great England. The Welsh were soon defeated and scattered… [But] When the barons came to do homage to Edward, he promised to give them a Welsh prince as ruler, one who had been born in Wales, and who could neither speak French nor English. On the day appointed, when the barons gathered to do homage to this new ruler, Edward appeared before them carrying in his arms his little baby son, who had been born at Caernarvon Castle only a few days before. Ever since that time, the eldest son of the King of England has been called the Prince of Wales, and England and Wales have formed one kingdom.

The antidote to this childish view is to be found in Gwynfor Evans's stirring and passionate history of his native land. For Evans, Wales was a nation even in Anglo-Saxon times. Whereas most English historians point out that she never had a centralised monarchy of her own, Evans tells us how she developed a federation of principalities, which was capable of posing a threat to the English, even when the Midlands were united under the rule of the Bretwalda Offa, King of Mercia, between 757 and 796. Why else would he have commissioned the building of Offa's Dyke? And Evans can also point to the fact that at the time of Hywel Dda (Howell the Good, c.880 – 950) the Welsh had a set of laws which recognised the rights of women in a way which English law failed to do for another 900 years.

Evans is openly contemptuous of the way in which the much vaunted Old English kingdom went down to defeat by means of a single day's fighting at Hastings, and thereafter collapsed altogether, whereas it took the Edward I many years to defeat the Welsh (and even then he did not crush them altogether). He also points out that it was Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1095 – c. 1155), who gave Britain one of its most celebrated heroes, in the shape of King Arthur, in his *History of the Kings of Britain*.

Geoffrey of Monmouth and his characters really did put Britain at the heart of Europe. The 'Matter of Britain' took its place alongside 'the Matter of France' and the 'Matter of Rome the Great' in the monastic libraries of Latin Christendom (which roughly corresponded to the old Common Market. This was a remarkable

achievement given that the book was intended to be a history, but the plot and the main characters were invented. In the introduction, Geoffrey tells us that his stories were largely based on an old Welsh (or Breton) book, but no-one has ever been able to identify this, and it almost certainly never existed:

> At a time when I was giving a good deal of attention to such matters, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the art of public speaking and well-informed about the history of foreign countries, presented me with a certain very ancient book written in the British language. This book, attractively composed to form a consecutive and orderly narrative, set out all the deeds of these men, from Brutus, the first King of the Britons, down to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo.

Scotland

Scotland was different from Wales and Ireland in that she did have a monarchy, older even than the one which emerged in England in the 9th century. Norman barons and knights had settled in the lowlands after 1066; but, prior to the reign of Edward I of England (1277-1327), relations between England and Scotland were relatively peaceful. Edwardian armies almost succeeded in conquering the northern kingdom, but failed, and the Scots fought and won no less than two Wars of Independence between 1296 and 1357, before the English would agree final terms for the divorce. This meant that the Scottish exit from English rule was a hard one indeed. For the next 300 years, there were Marches to the North and South of the Border, with castles and bastles and fortified churches all along it, and raiding and warfare were endemic.

The most important War of Independence, from our point of view, was the first between 1296 and 1328, since this created Scottish nationalism. As Neil Oliver tells us:

> In his fixation with the crown of Scotland, Edward (I) had underestimated her folk. He had torn the heart from one of them, but hundreds of thousands more were beating still, and loudly. Patriotism - the love of country - was not the cause of Scotland's wars of independence, but their product. Edward's determination to crush them had served only to define for the Scots who they really were. (*A History Of Scotland*)

This is not the place to relate the lives of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce; but the importance of the Scottish victory at Bannockburn in 1314 should not be underestimated. It is Bannockburn which is celebrated in what has become the de facto national anthem of Scotland – *Flower of Scotland*. The Scots version of the last verse says it all:

Thir days is past nou,

An in the past
Thay maun bide,
But we can aye rise nou,
An be the naition again,
That stuid agin him,
Prood Edwart's Airmie,
An sent him hamewart,
Tae think again.

Even H.E.Marshall had to recognise what the Scots had achieved – indeed she was obliged to, since she wrote books for both English and Scottish children. She recognised both Wallace and Bruce as heroes in a common struggle for freedom, just as she paid tribute to the people of England, who had forced Bad King John to agree to Magna Carta in 1215. In the modern world, Wallace has become more famous than Bruce, because of the enormous and worldwide success of Mel Gibson's film *Braveheart*. Indeed he could be said to have impacted on Scottish politics, since the film was made in 1992 and the Scots voted for devolution in 1997.

Perhaps the last word should go, however, to a group of men, rather than to an individual, the men being those who drew up and issued the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320. This was addressed to the Pope by the nobles of Scotland, but it deserves to be remembered more widely, as a ringing declaration by a group of freedom fighters, of their determination to carry on an unequal struggle, whatever the cost. It is also an example of how a genuine nationalist movement is not really powered by economic motors at all, but by a sense of common identity and solidarity in the face of oppression. That being so, it does no good at all to mock the nationalist on the grounds of his ignorance of the facts, or because he is too small or too weak to make it on his own.

> As long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be brought under English rule. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours, that we are fighting, but for freedom - for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.

Magnus Magnusson has pointed out that the Declaration deserves to be better known, not only for its nationalism, embodied in this 'freedom clause', but for an earlier sentence, which threatens to depose Robert the Bruce if he fails to live up to expectations! Why? "Because here we have the idea of 'elective kingship', of the contractual theory of monarchy". The Scots were making it clear to Bruce, who had not been an entirely consistent 'democrat' in the modern sense (why would he be?) that he was answerable to his subjects; and the threat to depose him is even more startling because this is the first time in European history that such an idea appears.

CHAPTER FOUR
ROBIN HOOD & MERRIE ENGLAND

When Adam delved (dug) and Eve Span
Who was then the gentleman?

Verse attributed to John Ball c.1381

The term 'Golden Age' is at least as old as the Greeks: it is mentioned in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod (c.750-c.650 BCE), and also by Plato (c.423-c.347 BCE). It refers to a period when mankind supposedly enjoyed peace and prosperity, and there was harmony between the nations and classes (if any existed at all). If one reads the Bible literally, it may be said to date from the Creation and the Garden of Eden. The rebels who took part in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (who almost certainly did read it literally) would have been familiar with the above refrain; but the myth was not always associated with revolution or a call for social change.

The Norman Yoke

Among those who stayed in England and did not go into exile after 1066 there was a lingering sense of resentment (as well as more active resistance than the Norman chroniclers cared to remember or record). In the 12th century, the Anglo-Norman chronicler Ordericus Vitalis describes the English as 'groaning aloud' for their lost liberty and plotting to regain it, by throwing off the yoke of the invader. The idea of the Norman Yoke was born; and it survived. We find it in the works of the Gilbertine monk Robert Mannyng (c. 1275 – c. 1338). He tells us plainly that we are all still suffering under the yoke of serfdom imposed by the Conqueror, from whose lords the upper class claims descent. In Thorlac Turville-Petre's translation:

For all this thraldom that now on England is,
Through Normans it came in, bondage and distress;
And if [the French] now had us in their power, mark ye well,
We should be controlled ten times more severely.

At much the same time, Robert of Gloucester (fl. c. 1260 – c. 1300) wrote a chronicle of British, English,and Norman history, in which he told how William the Conqueror had usurped the throne of England, harried the North country and made use of Domesday Book to impose ruinous taxes on the poor. In Robert's view the Normans still held the people of England in subjection, 250 years after 1066. This is a very different view from the 'assimilationist' narrative that we were given when I was young. Instead, Robert tells us that those in power in his day are still the masters; and the effects of the Conquest are a daily reality:

> The Normans could then speak nothing but their own language,
> And spoke French as they did at home and also taught their children,
> So that the upper class of the country that descend from them
> Stick to the language that they got from them.
> For, unless a person knows French he is little thought of-
> But the lower class stick to English and their own language even now.

The idea was developed further in the early 14th century by Andrew Horn, in a textbook for lawyers, *The Mirror of Justices*; and this was widely copied, and circulated in manuscript in Queen Elizabeth I's time. William Tyndale (1494-1536) linked the Norman Yoke with Protestantism, because the Pope had supported William the Conqueror in 1066, and promised 'forgiveness of sins to all in the invading army.'

The next stage in the life of the myth was linked with the career of one of the outstanding lawyers of his day, Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634). Coke was a champion of the common law (meaning of course, English common law), and traced its origins back to Anglo-Saxon times. In his view this pre-dated the Norman Conquest (which had, by implication, strengthened monarchical power).

After the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1640 censorship was effectively abolished and there was an enormous outpouring of radical literature, of all kinds. In particular, 1642 saw the publication of an English translation of *The Mirror of Justices*. The idea that there was a Norman Yoke, which ought to be lifted off our shoulders became a rallying cry, for the 'respectable classes' of a radical persuasion, and ultimately for Levellers and Social Levellers, or Diggers.

The Norman Yoke became a potent source of myth in modern times. In Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820) and Charles Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* (1865) Anglo-Saxon England was portrayed as a demi-paradise, where we were all happy, until the Normans came along and spoiled the party; but, before we accept this as a correct representation, we would do well to consider the picture which Eric John painted of Anglo-Saxon society:

> It is therefore necessary to emphasize that the society of late Anglo--Saxon England, like that of early Anglo-Saxon England, had great inequalities of wealth and position, and a very powerful aristocracy. This society was held

> together by the bonds of lordship, or perhaps better by the bonds and privileges of lordship. The great magnates were the vassals of their lord the king; they would, in turn have a number of ordinary warriors subordinate to them. It is probable that the bonds were symbolized by the ceremonies of homage and fealty. This kind of society is usually called feudal, except in the special case of English history. This exception has been made because scholars have traditionally agreed that 'feudalism' was introduced by William the Conqueror in 1066, although they have totally failed to agree about what this entailed.

In other words, by the time it was conceived, and throughout its long history, the Norman Yoke was an idea rather than a reality. It was the product of hatred and resentment of some aspects of the present, coupled with an impossible dream about our Anglo-Saxon past; and it waned in the early 19th century when Whigs and Radicals alike looked to the future rather than the past. Amazingly, however the idea of the Yoke, or at least the idea that we had enjoyed a greater measure of liberty before the Norman Conquest, enjoyed a revival in the late 19th century,

The first Regius Professors of Modern History were inclined to take the 'Germanist' view that our modern freedoms were born in the German woods of the 1st century C.E. Indeed Freeman took his Germanism to extremes: he detested the Second Empire in France, but was a fan of the Second Reich in Germany, and always referred to the 'restoration' (rather than the conquest) of Alsace in 1870-1.

Stubbs praised the old ways, which he thought we had inherited from our Anglo-Saxon forebears, and managed to preserve after 1066, despite the insertion of an absolute monarchy into an ancient constitution:

> In the preservation of the old forms, - the compurgation by the kindred of the accused, the responsibility for the *wergild*, the representation of the township in the court of the hundred, and that of the hundred in the court of the shire; the choice of witnesses; the delegation to chosen committees of the common judicial rights of the suitors of the folkmoot; the need of witnesses for the transfer of chattels, and the evidence of the hundred and shire as to criminals - in these remained the seeds of future liberties. (Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, quoting Stubbs)

In the same vein, J.R. Freeman thought of Anglo-Saxon England as being akin to the democratic republic he found in 19th century Switzerland and wrote of the Anglo-Saxon *Witanagemot* almost as if it were a modern Parliament. Much later, Sir Frank Stenton, author of *Anglo-Saxon England* (first published in 1943) still described the early Anglo-Saxons as a free and democratic people who, if they ever had an aristocracy, lost it somehow on the boats which brought them over from Germany. As we have seen, these ideas were in exploded in the second half of the 20th century, not least by the 'revisionism' of Eric John (1922-2000). This new generation pointed

out that late Anglo-Saxon England was in some respects almost as 'feudal' as Normandy, though it may have lacked the formal institution of knight's service.

Robin Hood

Was there ever an identifiable individual known as Robin Hood? J.C.Holt (1922-2014), who wrote the best book about Robin, told us that he had 'the unique distinction of being the only entry in the [first edition] of the *Dictionary of National Biography* which was devoted exclusively to proving that its subject never existed'; but it is indisputable that, like that other non-existent character in English history King Arthur, there was an extensive literature devoted to him, even in medieval times.

His literary persona first appears in William Langland's late fourteenth century poem *Piers the Plowman*, where Sloth, the lazy priest, confesses:

> I know not perfectly my Paternoster, as the priest it singeth,
> but I know rhymes of Robyn Hood, and Ranulf Earl of Chester.

Patrick Wormald took up the tales at this point, showing how they were added to over the intervening centuries:

> By the early 15th century, references have become relatively abundant. The earliest extant Robin Hood 'ryme', 'Robin Hood and the Monk', is found in a manuscript of 1450 or soon after. The central text of the cycle *A Gest of Robyn Hade,* is extant only in early 16th century printed texts, but some of its linguistic forms suggest it may have been composed nearer to 1400 than to 1500. Together with three or four other 'rymes' and a fragment of a play, these form the core of the legend as it was bequeathed by the Middle Ages. Robin already has his most familiar companions, Little John, Will Scarlett (or something similar), Much the Miller's son and Friar Tuck. He is at home in Sherwood Forest and the sworn enemy of the Sheriff of Nottingham. He is an archer of genius and a master of disguise. He is loyal to the king, and 'dyde pore men moch god', but he had no time for the wealthy and grasping religious orders: the *Gest* begins with the story of how Robin helped an impoverished knight pay his debt to the abbot of St Mary's York, and fleeced the abbey in the process. (Wormald, *London Review of Books*, 5 May 1983).

By the 1950s, Robin had become the subject of innumerable books, films and TV programmes; and my younger sister and I thrilled to Richard Greene's portrayal of him (and I to Patricia Driscoll's Maid Marian) in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, a series which ran between 1955 and 1959, mostly because it had a very catchy theme

tune, subsequently parodied by the Monty Python team in the late 1960s. He had also acquired fierce partisans, in many parts of the country, including Nottingham, Sherwood Forest, Wakefield, York, and Barnsdale. My daughter, who attended Nottingham University in the late 1990s, was outraged when the City of Doncaster had the audacity to call its airport after Robin Hood.

There came a time when historians began to study the early texts and their audience, in order to probe the social significance of the ballads concerning Robin and his adventures. This led to a series of articles in the pages of *Past and Present*, a journal founded in 1952 by a group of historians which included members of the Communist Party Historians Group, amongst them Rodney Hilton (1916-2002). In 1958, in article entitled *The Origins of Robin Hood* (P&P No 14, November, 1958), Hilton argued that there was continuity between the Robin Hood ballads and the agenda of some of the rebels involved in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. This idea was attacked with some vigour by J.C.Holt, in an article entitled *The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood* (P&P No. 18, November 1960). Holt pointed out that rural and peasant issues are nowhere found within the texts, and proposed that the supposedly dissident audience was in composed of the lower gentry, their hangers-on and higher servitors.

But there were other sources for Robin Hood, apart from the poetry and the ballads. These were the military and legal records, from which one might conclude that there were several Robin Hoods, not just one. The earliest known dates from 1226 and is a record of the York Assizes. This mentions a person named Robert Hod whose goods worth 32 shillings and 6 pence were confiscated. Hod became an outlaw. In the following year, he is called "Hobbehod"; but there are any other references to men of that name in the 13th century. Indeed John Maddicott has suggested that "Robin Hood" was a stock alias used by thieves. Between 1261 and 1300, there are at least eight references to 'Rabunhod' in various regions across England, from Berkshire in the south to York in the north. These men who came before the courts were criminals rather than heroes; and there is no sign that they robbed from the rich to give to the poor.

Another view again has been put forward by Andrew Ayton, who found an archer who was not (so far as we know) an outlaw:

> On 21 November 1338, forty-three archers joined the company of troops entrusted with the security of the Isle of Wight. The garrison pay-roll, which forms the greater part of an excellent set of accounts now preserved at the Public Record Office, records the names of the newly arrived men. In their midst is a name as familiar as any from English literature or history: Robin Hood. (Ayton, *Military Service and the Development of the Robin Hood Legend in the Fourteenth Century*, Nottingham Medieval Studies, 1992)

Ayton thought he had found his man, and that this soldier on the Isle of Wight could well have been such a crack shot that he became the subject of the tales

we are even now so familiar with; but hundreds of tales have been told about Robin Hood over the centuries, and dozen of theories have been advanced as to the historicity of the character. The only safe thing we can say is that he represents a mythical past, when the outlaws roamed free, unrestricted by convention or law, in a green version of the Golden Age.

Merrie England

'Merrie England' was an English version of the golden age - a regret and a longing for the countryside and a way of life that we think that we once enjoyed and have long since lost. It has taken various forms but usually relates to the late Middle Ages. Perhaps the most commonly quoted expression of these feelings are that made by Dr John Caius, second founder of Gonville and Caius College Cambridge, who referred in 1552 to 'the old world when this country was called Merry England.' In modern times, as Ronald Hutton reminded us, M.M.Postan called the `14th century 'the golden age of the English boroughs' and Thorold Rogers described the 15th century as 'the golden age of the English labourer', while Joel Rosenthal labelled these two centuries as a whole as 'a golden age for the nobility.' Later, Keith Thomas pointed to the tendency of social commentators to locate 'the vanished age of merriment' in the relatively recent past, so that Elizabethans looked back fondly on the period before the Reformation, while writers of the early Stuart period regretted the passing of the Elizabethan period, and authors of the later Stuart period were nostalgic about the early 17th century.

In *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* – a study of the innumberable folk festivals which once existed in England, but which are now only residually celebrated – Hutton concluded that England had ceased to be 'merry' largely as a result of the Reformation of the 16th century and the Puritan Revolution of the 17th, but on the other hand, that these festivals had largely been developed in late medieval period, rather than being pagan or prehistoric survivals.

The most typical inhabitant of Merry England was the engliish yeoman. Fundamentally the yeomen occupied a place in society below the gentlemen, but certainly well above that occupied by the landless peasant. A dictionary definition states that a yeoman was "a person qualified by possessing free land of 40/- (shillings) annual [feudal] value, and who can serve on juries and vote for a Knight of the Shire. Of more interest is the fact that, in the conventional version of English history, the yeomen were the bowmen who won the battles of Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt, and humbled the French aristocracy; but there is a great deal of confusion (as there is with Robin Hood) as to whether the yeoman was a peasant or gentleman.

In the novels written about Agincourt by Michael Cox and Bernard Cornwell, the heroes, Jenkin Lloyd and Nicholas Hook, are poor men, in fact landless peasants, and Cox's hero tells us that his friends are of the same ilk. Postan wrote that when he studied medieval court rolls, peasant genealogies and inheritance cases, he often

found that peasants were missing because they were 'absent, missing or slain in their lord's or the king's service'. The longbow was never considered to be a noble weapon; and the archers were certainly inferior in social terms to the men at arms, let alone the knights. They were paid less; they were treated very differently when it came to military discipline, and the code of chivalry did not apply to them.

The truth is that yeomen were commoners but they were not at the bottom of the pile. In 1413 Parliament enacted a statute which required anyone who brought a lawsuit to describe himself; and the terms men most commonly used were 'knight', 'squire', 'gentleman', 'yeoman' and 'husbandman'. The French Rolls for 1415 contain several references to 'yeomen of the household' or 'yeoman usher of the household'; and these were clearly men who enjoyed relatively high social status.

What did it mean to be a yeoman in military terms? Literature tends to focus on spiritual quality rather than material wealth, although some archers were mounted and must have had the means to support a team of horses and light armour to go with them. Shakespeare's Henry V addresses a generic yeoman on the eve of the battle, telling him in effect that he is the backbone of the army

> And you, good yeoman,
> Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
> The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
> That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not.

This English archer, or yeoman, had appeared in a favourable light in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales at the end of the fourteenth century and in Roger Asham's Toxophilus (1545); but modern writers have also waxed lyrical. Wylie wrote of the archer's 'swift and unerring skill': apparently, he 'shot never arrow amiss'. In 1976, Robert Hardy appeared to think that his skill was heritable:

> At his best there was no man in the world to beat him, no matter the odds against him; and his breed lasted long beyond the longbow; he used the musket and the rifle; he endured in 1915 the same, and worse, than his forefathers had suffered in 1415...

As recently as 2003, in *The Adventure of English* Melvyn Bragg could still write that 'it was the English bowmen with their hearts of oak who turned the battle.' This is stirring stuff but it is scarcely serious history.

We should remember that the English archers at Agincourt were part of an efficient killing-machine. Specifically, one of the reasons for their success was that, unlike French crossbowmen, they were trained to rush forward and attack the enemy when they had run out of arrows. When they did this, they used a new type of weapon, new at any rate to a French monk of St Denis who wrote a chronicle:

> They had lead-hammers (massues de plomb) which, with a single blow, were capable of killing a man, or at any rate of laying him out unconscious.

So, the English bowmen sometimes used hammers to batter their opponents to death. They may also have made use of the notorious 'kidney' or 'bollock' dagger, whose use will be obvious to the most uninformed reader.

The myth of Merrie England also enjoyed a revival in the late 19th century, by which time the majority of us were living in towns, though we retained a great fondness for the English countryside. According to many late Victorian writers rural depopulation was a 'great national tragedy', when ordinary working people were ejected from the soil and condemned to live in conditions of misery in the towns. Romantics, Radicals and some Socialists all agreed that something important had been lost when the Englishman lost contact with 'Merrie England'. In the 1880s, some politicians even took up the cry 'Three acres and a cow', as a remedy for rural poverty and a slogan for land reform. In 1890 the founder of the Arts & Crafts movement William Morris published *News from Nowhere*, in which he imagined an England where the bulk of the population had reverted to rural living. In this Utopia there are no large cities, no private property and no money, no police force or army or courts or prisons, no divorce and no class system. The people here live in plenty and harmony because they find pleasure in their work. In *Merrie England*, published in 1893, the Socialist Robert Blatchford attacked the thinking of what he called 'the Manchester School'. He was completely opposed to the idea that progress inevitably involved the adoption of the factory system, which he rejected as ugly, disagreeable, mechanical and injurious to health. The factory districts of Lancashire were ugly, dirty, smoky and disagreeable. On the other hand, he lavished extravagant praise on the English countryside:

> Is any carpet so beautiful and so pleasant as a carpet of grass or daisies? Is the fifth rate music you play upon your cheap pianos as sweet as the songs of the gushing streams and joyous birds? And does a week at a spoiled and vulgar watering place repay you for fifty-one weeks' toil and smother in hideous and dirty town?

Of course, there were always Liberals and Progressives and Marxists who thought that the move from the countryside to the town was inveitable; and that 'Merrie England' was a myth – the kind of Golden Age which each generation invents for itself, to prove that '*Fings Ain't What they Used to Be*'. Even in Karl Marx's view the peasant was an obstacle to progress: it was necessary to endure the horrors of capitalism, industrialisation and urbanisation, before socialism (let alone communism) could be established, by the working class which these painful transformations would bring into being. Yet the belief in Merrie England still persists – at least in popular culture, despite the fact that there has never been any clear agreement as to when it existed. Some have placed it before the Norman Conquest, others in the late Middle Ages, some before the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, others before the First World War.

J.R.Green, author of several immensely popular books about English history, described a typical Anglo-Saxon town of the 8th century, in terms which would have appealed to William Morris, Robert Blatchford and numerous other Socialists in search of the perfect society:

> All the features of English life, in fact, all its characteristic features were already there. We see mills grinding along the burns, the hammer rings in the village smithy, the thegn's hall rises out of its demesne, the parish priest is at his mass-book in the little church that forms the centre of every township, reeves are gathering their lord's dues, forester and verderer wake the silent woodland with hound and horn, the moot gathers for order and law beneath the sacred oak. (Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, quoting Green)

'Merrie England' is also a comic opera, set against the background of Elizabethan England. Well-known songs from it include *The Yeomen of Englan. F*irst performed in 1902, it was revived and became very popular again, in the so-called 'Second Elizabeth Age' of the 1950s. One feature of one version of 'Merry England' – both the myth and the opera – was the importance of the yeomen. It is notable that the librettist asked the historian's question, though he gave a somewhat romantic answer to it :

Who were the Yeomen -
The Yeomen of England?
The freemen were the Yeomen,
The freemen of England!

Where are the Yeomen -
The Yeomen of England?
In home-stead and in cottage
They still dwell in England!
Stained with the ruddy tan,
God's air doth give a man.

We used to sing this song with gusto at my school in Liverpool, although there were very few of us who had a ruddy tan, unless it had recently been acquired in Cornwall, or – in a very few cases then – on the Costa Brava.

The Merchant's Complaint

Medieval England was always small, in terms of territory and population, in comparison with her potential enemies and principal trading partners. In the early

15th century that meant Spain, various German and Italian city states, and the newly enlarged Burgundian domains (now including most of Picardy, Flanders and Holland). However, the English had long been able to 'punch above their weight' because their Kingdom was relatively centralised in terms of government, law and taxation, and because they had the great ports of London and Dover, to which (in 1347) they added Calais.

All wool destined for the Low Countries was now compelled to pass through the Staple at Calais; and around 1437 the anonymous author of the poem *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* argued that Dover and Calais had become the 'twin eyes' which enabled England to control access to what we now call the English Channel. He advocated an aggressive foreign and commercial policy, based on the exercise of seapower, and a more assertive, proto-mercantilist, approach to trade. The central message is contained in the first verses:

Cherish marchaundyes keep th'amiraltee
That we be maysteres of the narow see.

. The background to the *Libelle* was that, in alliance with Burgundy, Henry V (r.1413-1422) and his brother Bedford had conquered the Duchy of Normandy and overrun a large part of Northern France (including Paris); but the English position in France was put in jeopardy in 1435-6, when there was a large scale revolt in Normandy, a Peace Treaty between the French and the Burgundians, and the Duke of Bedford died. In June and July 1436, the Burgundians laid siege to Calais, and in September the Dauphinist French recovered Paris. These reversals of fortune, and the perceived treachery of the Burgundians (or 'Flemings') led to attacks by the London mob on Picard, Flemish and Dutch merchants.

The poet who wrote the *Libelle* develops his argument by reviewing England's main enemies – by which he means Spain and Burgundian Flanders. He describes their main products and exports and points out how heavily dependant each of them is on English markets, and upon free use of the English Channel. He implies that we have been too soft in the past. If only we show these people who is boss, we can obtain better terms. The tone is not only nationalist, but bombastic, even jingoistic. The poet is clearly seeking a better deal all round.

At the centre of the argument is the idea that Flanders lies at the heart of Europe; but England has the ability to dictate terms to the Flemings, and therefore to Spain, because she controls the Channel and supplies the wool for the hugely important Flemish cloth industry:

For Spayne and Flaundres is ech other[‘s] brother
And nether may wel liven without [the] other.

They may not live to maintein her degrees
Without our Englishe commoditees
Wolle and tinne; for the wolle of England
Susteineth the common Flemminges, I understand.

So, if we were to place an embargo on the export of our wool to Europe, or - better still - blockade the Continent (as Nelson was to do, nearly 400 years later), the Flemings (and others) would have to submit. Otherwise the Flemings at least would starve.

So far, the poet's invective has been directed against England's enemies ; but, after passing swipes at the Breton pirates and the Scots, he now turns his attention to our trading partners - the Portuguese, Icelanders, Hanseatic city states and other Germans, and lastly the Italians. His argument is that we are being taken advantage of and (in some cases) cheated; but all we have to do is be confident, and take back control. He is certain that we can make our country great again, because we have been great in the past, especially in the time of Henry V and Bedford, and before that in the time of Edward III, and before that in the time of the Anglo-Saxon King Edgar. We can hit all our adversaries where it hurts – in their pockets – if we so choose.

It is the Italians who most annoy our English poet, and especially the Venetians and Florentines. These merchants import luxury goods – spices, sweet wines, and even exotic pets, which we can well do without:

All spicerye and other grocers ware,
Wyth swete wynes, all manere of chaffare [merchandise],
Apes and japes and marmusettes taylede,
Nifles, trifles, that litell availed,
And thynges with whiche they fetely blere our eye
Wyth thynges not endurynge that we bye.

These Italians also engage in unfair trading practices. At this point the Old (or more accurately Middle) English used by the poet is somewhat difficult to understand; but, as Gerald Harriss explained it:

> Even worse was the Florentine stranglehold on credit and exchange; for by deferring payment on their purchase of wool in England, then using the cash from its sale in Flanders to service transfers of money by English merchants to London through letters of exchange, they were effectively charging their customers interest on their own money. (Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*).

In short, the Florentine contrives to have his cake and eat it, and at the same time he 'rubs our noses in it', or rather we are made to

Wipen our nose with our owen sleve.

The litany of complaints has become familiar in England during the last few decades. 'They come over here and take our [money/jobs/women].' 'They are crafty/know the ropes better than us'. 'We play by the rules and they don't.' But not for much longer, if our poet has his way. He proposes that we should refuse to play by our competitors' rules, if they are not willing to play by ours. Our merchants should also spend less time going to plays and parties, and more on minding the shop:

Gestes [plays] and festes [parties] stoppen our policye.

What is the remedy? The *Libelle* insists that, where English merchants in foreign countries are required to live with a host, we should impose corresponding restrictions when they come here. Likewise, we should levy the same tolls and storage charges as the foreigners do; and, as Liam Fox might have said, our merchants should spend less time playing about and more time buccaneering. We should also be more ready to use the stick as well as the carrot, both on land and at sea. We will all be better off, as a result.

Lastly, the writer of the *Libelle* is worried about the situation in Ireland and in Wales (not so much about Scotland, since it is taken as read that the Scots are out enemies). Ireland is a concern because the island is divided between the Anglo-Irish and the Gaels, or 'wild Irish'; and the poet is very conscious of what historians call the Gaelic Resurgence. In other words, most of Ireland outside 'the Pale' of Dublin is already out of control ; and if we are not careful, we may lose the Pale itself :

Ye remembre, with a1 your might tak hede
To kepen Ireland that it be not lost;
For it is a boterasse [buttress] and a post
Under England…
I am aferd that Ireland wol be shente.
It must away, it wol be lost from us,

The writer is also fearful that there may be a further rebellion in Wales. Though he is not mentioned by name, Owain Glyndwr ('Owen Glendower') casts a long shadow here. His revolt, which affected almost the whole of Wales, had only been put down some twenty years previously. The Irish and the Welsh may even form an alliance; and then we will be surrounded by hostile (and mostly Celtic) nations, in less than splendid isolation:

Which if [Ireland] be lost, as Christ Jhesu forbede,
Farwel Wales; than England cometh to drede
For alliaunce af Scotland and of Spayne
And other mo, as the Pety Britaine {Brittany],

And so enmies environ round about.

Fascinating though it is, *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* was more of a dream than a detailed plan; and it suffers from two major defects. First, the poet is saying that we should 'put England first' when it comes to trade and commerce ; but there is no detailed programme; and the argument assumes that the governent is at fault in not having done this already. It also assumes that trade is a zero-sum game, a contest where there are no benefits to be derived from co-operation.

Second, if the policy is to work, England must be able to deliver a powerful punch when necessary, and not merely at the conference table, but on the high seas. Yet that assumes that we continue to spend as much on defence, and in particular the Navy, as the great Henry V did; but the inconvenient truth in the late 1430s was that we were unable to garrison English Normandy sufficiently to repel an attack, and that Henry's Navy no longer existed. Indeed Susan Rose's study of the relevant accounts shows that most of his great ships had been sold off soon after his death in 1422, and there were further cuts to the Royal Navy in the late 1420s and early 1430s. Consequently, Susan Rose concluded that :

The Lawyer's Boast

Sir John Fortescue (c.1394 – 1479) was a lawyer and senior judge, and the author of *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* (*Concerning the Praises of the Laws of England*) a treatise on English law. He was loyal to Henry VI during the Wars of the Roses, and wrote *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* for the instruction of Henry's young son Prince Edward. His book is proof that English nationalist sentiments were not just the product of ignorant xenophobia: Fortescue was a highly-educated man who lived in France for several years.

Fortescue explains why the English have the best customary, or common, law. He argues that it is very old, and has survived many changes of regime:

> The kingdom of England was first inhabited by Britons; then ruled by Romans, again by Britons, then possessed by Saxons, who changed its name from Britain to England. Then for a short time the kingdom was conquered by Danes, and again by Saxons, but finally by Normans, whose posterity hold the realm at the present time. And throughout the period of these nations and their kings, the realm has been continuously ruled by the same customs as it is .now.

Fortescue then takes a look at statute law, and explains that England is a limited monarchy:

> The statutes of the English are good. These, indeed, do not emanate from the will of the prince alone, as do the laws in kingdoms which are governed entirely regally, where so often statutes secure the advantage of their maker only. The statutes of England are made not only by the prince's will, but also by the assent of the whole realm, so they cannot be injurious to the people nor fail to secure their advantage.

Lastly, Fortescue compares certain aspects of English common law and the Roman or 'civil' law, and always to England's advantage. The French rely on the evidence of two witnesses, but also use torture, to extract a confession from the accused. This is totally wrong and un-English:

> [The law of France] prefers the accused to he racked with tortures until they themselves confess their guilt, than to proceed by the deposition of witnesses who are often instigated to perjury by wicked passions and sometimes by the subornation of evil persons, By such precaution and disingenuousness, criminals and suspected criminals are afflicted with so many kinds of tortures in that kingdom that the pen scorns to put them into writing, Some are stretched on racks, whereby their sinews are lacerated and their veins gush out streams of blood. The tendons and joints of some are sundered by divers suspended weights. The mouths of others are gagged open while such a torrent of water is poured in that it swells their bellies mountain-high, and then, being pierced with a spit or a similar sharp instrument, the belly spouts water through the hole, as a whale, when it has taken in the sea along with the herrings and other small fish of the sea, spouts water to the height of a plum tree… But who is so hardy that, having once passed through this atrocious torment, would not rather, though innocent, confess to every kind of crime, than submit again to the agony of torture?

Fortescue is also very clear that the jury system is far better than the testimony of two witnesses only, whether this is supported by the use of torture or not.

So far, Fortescue's explanation of the superiority of England is confined to the law and the legal system; but in explaining the merits of trial by jury, he sings a full hymn of praise to England and the English in general, addressed to Prince Edward, who can scarcely remember the home country:

> [England] is so well stocked and replete with possessors of land and fields that in it no hamlet, however small, can be found in which there is no knight, esquire, or householder of the sort commonly called a franklin, well-off in possessions; nor numerous other free tenants, and many yeomen, sufficient in patrimony to make a jury in the form described above.

So, the reason for the difference between the English and other systems of law, French in particular, is to be found in economic and social conditions. In England, these conditions produce in a sufficient number of prosperous and intelligent yeomen 'capable of jury service, whereas in France and other countries, poverty and oppression prevent the emergence of the men required.

A word of warning. Before we are totally carred away by Sir John's eloquence – and he was after all a barrister, well used to pleading a case or cause – we should remember that this system of law is the same which appears in the pages of the Paston Letters; and those letters, which span almost the whole of the late 15th century, tell a story of endemic injustice, where juries are routinely packed, verdicts do not reflect the evidence, and when it is delivered, justice is repeatedly overturned by resort to main force. In the world of the Pastons, the powerful get their way by hook or by crook. War-war frequently triumphs over jaw-jaw.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RISE OF ENGLISH NATIONALISM

> And the people of this country want war. Peace is no good to them. By God, Lackinghay…I won't be bound by treaties and pacts and promises - the French never kept any of theirs in the past. I pointed that out several times at the various meetings we had with them outside Calais.
>
> The Duke of Gloucester, 1396

By the end of the 13th century, the English may have largely forgotten their Anglo-Saxon past, since the aristocracy and the literate classes had been part of a French-speaking culture for over 200 years; but it lived on in folklore and legend, in the worship of Old English Saints, in the parish church and in the pub; and it certainly lived on in the language, for the majority of Englishmen and women never learned to speak French, or any version of it. If we define the nation in terms of its territory, people, and language, then England and the English survived the Norman Conquest well enough. However, the English attempt to conquer Scotland failed, while the conquests of Wales and Ireland were only successful in the political sense. The Gaelic languages, culture and law, all survived too. For the rest of the Middle Ages, therefore, there was no such thing as a British identity; and, when the national spirit re-surfaced in England, it was an English, and not a British nationalism which was born.

The Birth of English Nationalism

Conventionally, nationalism has been portrayed as a child of the 19th century, associated with the unification of Italy and Germany, the disintegration of the Turkish Empire in the Balkans and Gladstone's momentous decision to support Home Rule for Ireland; but English nationalism dates from the medieval period. , The English did not need to organise or fight for their own state: they had one in the time of Alfred the Great. Their problem was that this state had been conquered, and its language had gone underground, becoming a *patois*, so far as the Normans were

concerned. The official languages of government, as well as of polite society, chivalry and literature, were now French and Latin, and this remained the case for a very long while.

When the vernacular re-emerged, it had ceased to be Anglo-Saxon and had become 'Middle English'; and this was associated with a new kind of nationalism. Historians have differed as to when this change occurred; but, some 20 years ago, Thurlac Turville-Petre argued convincingly that the critical years were those between 1290 and 1340. In his view there were two English chroniclers in particular, Robert Mannyng and Robert of Gloucester who wrote at this time and 'fashioned a history of the nation in which three features (language, literature and national identity) were inter-twined'.

Robert Manning tells us expressly that his book is intended for the English people - 'those who live in this country who know neither Latin nor French'. He also tells us that his theme is the history of the English, rather than of the Britons who preceded them; and, his narrative is very different from Geoffrey of Monmouth's. Specifically, Manning introduces a strange new character called Engle who, though British, assumes leadership of the Saxons, and gives his name to our country. This paves the way for the glorious future of the English, who are by the way, both good and good-looking:

Wel more oughte Englys love God and drede
than any nacion or any lede [people],
For a grace that God hath hem gyven
Forby [above] alle those kyndes [races] that lyven:
Als fair are the comune pedaille [people]
As the lordynges, and of entaille [of good appearance];

Manning and Gloucester both complain loudly about the 'Norman Yoke' – so much so that we may ask why their nationalism not run in political channels. The answer is partly that they were probably both inhabitants of the monastery library, and not naturally inclined to armed struggle, and partly that the Normans and their descendants may have been regarded as foreigners, but the King was not. Accordingly, the Norman Yoke may have been a cause of discontent, but it was not a programme for political change.

If the English were not at this date struggling to be free in the political sense, their nationalism did become important in time of war. In the late 13th century, the most formidable opponent for the new King of England, Edward I (1272-1307), was Philip the Fair of France (r. 1285-1314). The two kings were each men of great ability and even greater ruthlessness. Edward is famous in these Islands for the way in which he treated the Scot William Wallace, who was hung, drawn and quartered in London; but Philip is equally notorious in France for his cruel treatment of the Templars, several of whom (including the Grand Mastter of the Order) were burnt at the stake.

The two monarchs clashed over the English Duchy of Gascony, because neither could live with the settlement of the dispue made in Paris in 1259. The result was war, between 1294 and 1298 and again between 1300 and 1303, during which the French invaded and occupied the Duchy. This coincided with Edward's war in Scotland, and indeed the two conflicts became one, because the Scots allied with the French as early as 1294, thereby forming the extraordinarily longlasting 'Auld Alliance'.

Edward I was well placed to play the English card, because he bore an English name. His father had called him after Edward the Confessor, whose shrine lay in the new abbey at Westminster. Accordingly, Edward presented his disputes with the French, the Welsh and the Scots as being quarrels which involved the whole nation, rather than matters which merely concerned his dynasty. This is a tactic adopted by many a modern dictator; but we can only guess at how successful he was at selling his story to his people, given the state of medieval communications.

We know that it was a moot point as to whether the feudal obligation to render military service to the King of England applied, when the King wanted to undertake a Continental expedition; but Edward I did run into difficulties when he summoned the host to go with him to Gascony in 1294. Accordingly, when he issued summonses of a similar nature the following year, he included a warning as to what the French might do next, if he did not receive enough support:

> 'The king of France, not satisfied with the treacherous invasion of Gascony, has prepared a mighty fleet and army, for the purpose of invading England and wiping the English tongue from the face of the earth'. (Marc Morris).

Was Edward inventing the danger, or was it real? Was he egging the English on, or merely responding to an existing Francophobia? We should note that the fear of invasion certainly had some basis in fact. The French had invaded in 1217 as well as in 1066, while

> The war of 1294 had its origins in naval rivalry, and Edward I took steps to provide England with the ships necessary to deal with the French threat. In 1294 he ordered the construction of thirty galleys each of 120 oars, with attendant barges. Eight of the galleys are known to have been built, and there may well have been more.. [But] French galleys attacked Dover, Winchelsea, and Hythe in 1295. (Prestwich)

Edward I's view of the Welsh and Scots was that they were traitors because they rejected ancient feudal bonds which tied them to the English monarchy; and this probably reflected a popular English view: there is evidence, other than royal propaganda, which suggests this. During the conquest of Wales by Edward I Archbishop Pecham remarked that the Welsh were 'idle, immoral and dishonest', while the King himself is reputed to have said, when leaving Scotland after his first

war of conquest, that 'A man does good business, when he rids himself of a turd'. The signs are that many Engishmen, especially in the North, regarded the Scots with a similar degree of contempt. The chronicler Peter Langtoft (d.c.1305) hoped that the Scots would be cursed by the Mother of God, and that the Welsh 'be sunk deep to the devil.'

It is right to point out that the English were also the subjects of prejudice and vulgar abuse. Foreigners commonly thought we had tails, while Simon de Montfort considered us to be unfaithful deceivers. Archbishop Langton was heard to say that the English were 'known everywhere for their incontinence, gluttony and drunkenness', while in the 14th century the monk and chronicler Ranulph Higden wrote that we were:

> Gluttonous, drunken, dishonest and irreligious [though also] brave warriors and highly adaptable. (Prestwich, *Politics*).

It is an uncomfortable conclusion to draw; but there is more than a hint here of the old French idea of *L'Albion Perfide* - that the English were a nation which could not be trusted.

The Hundred Years War

English nationalism came to maturity during the long series of conflicts between England and France, which we call the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). Originating in a dynastic and feudal dispute the war escalated into a national quarrel, so that by the time it wound down (no peace treaty ever being signed) we can hear and see the national spirit at play quite clearly, and on both sides of the Channel, in art and architecture, and in poetry and literature. In England, Englishness can be seen in the flowering of Perpendicular architecture during the reigns of Henry V (1413-22) and Henry VI (1422-1461 and 1470-1). In France, the period witnessed both the long reign of Charles VII, (1422-1461) called 'the Victorious' and the brief life of Joan of Arc (1412-1431), who was declared a martyr in 1456, though she was not canonised until 1920. She remains visible in almost every French town.

While Edward I's war with the French was confined to Gascony, Edward III took the fight to the French, at first in Flanders, then in Normandy and Gascony, and finally to Paris itself. His successes were built on his close relationship with the military classes, for he and his sons and companions were first and foremost soldiers. He also created many new peerages, including dukedoms for his sons, and the Order of the Garter for a select group of knights.

In the late Middle Ages, the Papacy was widely discredited by the so-called 'Babylonian captivity', when the Pope resided in Avignon rather than in Rome (1309-1377) and by the Great Schism, (1378-1417) when there were at least two Popes (and sometimes three) at any one time. As a result of the War between England and

France, allegiance to the rival popes was politicized, with England and her allies recognising the Pope in Rome, while France and her allies recognised the Pope in Avignon. The healing of the Papal Schism involved the calling of several General Councils of the Church and the idea that the Papacy should be subordinate to the Council. In England, papal power was restricted by a series of statutes by which the monarchy 'took back control' over appointments to bishoprics and abbeys. The result of these developments was that the English nation state became more 'insular'. Never again was there an English Pope, nor was any subsequent English monarch recognised as a Saint, as St Edmund and St Edward the Confessor had once been.

Though they were to suffer significant reverses later, the English were remarkably successful on land and at sea between 1337 and 1360; and their victories at Crécy, Sluys, and Poitiers made them famous. The chronicler Jean le Bel wrote:

> When the noble Edward first gained England in his youth nobody thought much of the English, nobody spoke of their prowess or courage. Now, in the time of the noble Edward, who has often put them to the test, they are the finest and most daring warriors known to man.

In the late 14th century French ceased to be a living language in England. Though the upper classes continued to speak it, they now had to be taught it, rather than learn it at home. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer's Prioress went to a school in 'Stratford-atte-Bow', in East London.

And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hir unknowe.

[And she spoke French fairly and fluently,
After the school of Stratford-at-Bow,
For French of Paris she did not know].

By the end of the century English was used by the leading poets of the day – Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400), John Gower (d. 1408) and William Langland (d. 1386), although Gower also wrote in French and Latin and the most popular and most widely-read chronicler, Jean Froissart, wrote in French. It was also during the 14th and 15th centuries that Geoffrey of Monmouth's stories of Brutus and Arthur began to circulate widely in English, in the many editions of the English 'Brut' prose chronicle which have come down to us. There are no fewer than 184 versions of the English translation of the work in medieval and post-medieval manuscripts, a figure which is only 'topped' by the number of manuscripts of Wycliffe's (English) Bible.

To read Chaucer is a revelation in terms of style and language; but the content is also important. Some historians, notably Barbara Tuchman (1912-1989) in *A Distant Mirror*, *The Calamitous 14th Century* have portrayed that century as the worst

ever - a time when warfare and plague brought devastation on an unparalleled scale, along with altered states of mind, pessimism and cruelty; but Chaucer is an antidote to all this. *The Canterbury Tales* are full of characters who are 'just about managing'; but they 'can take it' and are still 'open for business', and they contrive to preserve their sense of humour as they do. Which nation does this remind you of?

Contrary to popular memory, England experienced both triumph and disaster during the Hundred Years War. In the 1370s and 1380s the French gained the upper hand both militarily and diplomatically; and in some years there was a serious fear of invasion. This comes as a surprise. We are used to the idea of invasion scares in 1588, 1803-5, 1859-60, in the prelude to the First World War, and in 1940; but few people are aware that it was also a potent driver of national feeling in the 1340s and 1380s.

Jonathan Sumption tells us that, when an English army captured Caen in Normandy in 1346, royal clerks found a copy of an agreement made in 1338, between the King of France and the communities of Normandy. This contained a detailed plan for the invasion of England, and for her destruction by fire and sword. The document was sent to England; and the Archbishop of Canterbury arranged for it to be read to a large crowd gathered at St Paul's, while the King circulated the story that, following a French invasion, the English would be made to speak French. Michael Prestwich has suggested that the discovery of this invasion plan may well be a piece of 'fake news'; but there was nothing fake about the invasion scare of 1385. The French preparations that year were a matter of public knowledge. According to Froissart, they assembled an impressive number of men, ships and stores, which even included a most unusual piece of flatpack furniture:

> To go with [the fleet] the Constable was getting carpenters to build the enclosing walls of a town, made entirely of good, strong timber, to be set down in England wherever desired after landing. Inside this the lords could be quartered at night, to avoid the dangers of surprise attacks and to sleep more comfortably and securely. For movement from place to place, this town was so constructed that it could be taken down by loosening the joints, which toothed into each other, and reassembled section by section.

In the event, the French did not invade England that year; but, in May 1385, a French fleet consisting of 180 ships, and commanded by the formidable Jean de Vienne, sailed from Sluys to Leith in Scotland and landed a small army there. A Franco-Scots invasion of the North of England was then planned, and a joint force succeeded in taking the castle of Wark in Northumberland. Meanwhile, Jean de Vienne led his men in an attack on the English West March, launching an unsuccessful attack on Carlisle in September. The whole episode, which is somewhat reminisicent of the reversals of fortune suffered on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918, undermined confidence in the value of the Auld Alliance, both in Scotland and in France.

In *The Fourteenth Century* (1959) May Mckisack expressed the opinion that the war with the French 'bred a Francophobia, which died hard in England'. She cited the poet Laurence Minot (c. 1300 – c. 1352), the chroniclers Ranulph Higden (c. 1280 - 1364) and Henry Knighton (d. c. 1396), and William Langland (c.1332 – c.1386), the poet who painted a picture of English society in *Piers Plowman*. For Minot, Edward III was a hero, while King Philip VI of France was a coward – it was as simply as that:

Sir Philip of France fled for doubt
And hied him home with all his rout.
Coward, God give him care.

(M. Prestwich)

Francophobia is a type of fear; but there is also evidence that the English simply disliked the French. In 1384, the French poet Eustace Deschamps visited Calais, which had been captured by Edward III and stuffed with English settlers.

> He was dismayed by what he saw. Here was a French town populated by Englishmen, where it was impossible to sleep at night for the biting of fleas and the sound of crashing waves, braying horses and mewling babies. He was abused as a French 'wine bibber'. Soldiers watching out for spies stopped him in the street and demanded to see his papers. By the end of his visit the few words of English he had picked up included 'Franche dogue', 'goday' and ' commidre' [come 'ere]. The English, he reminded himself, had tails. Four centuries before Hogarth and Sterne, Calais was already the meeting point of alien cultures. (Sumption).

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Perhaps the most vivid example of English dislike of the French comes from the pages of Froissart's *Chronicles*. The writer tells of the Duke of Gloucester's reaction to the news of the catastrophic defeat of the French army by the Ottomans at Nicopolis (in modern Bulgaria) in 1396. This was the first time a Western army of Crusaders had encountered the Turks and it was virtually wiped out, though several prominent members of the French nobility were taken prisoner. Yet all the Duke of Gloucester could do was gloat:

> Now I must say something about Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, the youngest son of King Edward III, in connexion with his constant and heartfelt dislike of the French. He was rather pleased than sorry to hear of the defeat which they had suffered in Hungary' and, having with him a knight called John Lackinghay, the chief and most intimate of his counsellors, he confided in him and said: Those frivolous French got themselves thoroughly smashed up in Hungary and Turkey. Foreign knights and squires who go and fight for them don't know what they are doing, they couldn't be worse advised. They are so

> over- brimming with conceit that they never bring any of their enterprises to a successful conclusion.

At the end of the 15th century William Caxton (father of English printing) thought that the end of the fighting in France marked the passing of a golden age He addressed scathing remarks to the knights of his own day, when he recalled former glories:

> O ye knights of England where is the custom and usage of chivalry that was used in those days? What do ye now but go to the baths and play at dice? Leave this, leave it! Read the volumes of the Holy Grail, of Lancelot, of Galahad... of Gawain.... There shall you see manhood, courtesy and gentleness. And look in the latter days at the noble acts since the conquest; as in the days of King Richard Coeur de Lion; of Edward I and III, and of his noble sons; of Sir Robert Knowles, Sir John Hawkwood, Sir John Chandos.... Read Froissart!

Had something really been lost, we may wonder, or is this simply the familiar complaint of an old man, that things are not as they used to be, and the young do not behave properly?

The Welsh Princes of Wales

It is a persistent theme in Gwynfor Evans's *Land of My Fathers* that the Welsh were a a nation, and Wales was one country long before the English and England were, and that it was a nation yearning to be free. So, as early as the 12th century, Gerald of Wales (also known as Giraldus Cambrensis) could write about:

> A people in love with life, and yet ready to sacrifice much -'to scorn delights and live laborious days'- and, indeed, to give their very lives when necessary, for the good of their community.

> Further, according to Gerald, the Welsh were:

> Not addicted to gluttony or drunkeness, this people show no ostentation in food or dress, and whose minds are always alert to defend their country and their property. No one of this nation ever begs, for the houses of all are common to all. They place liberality and hospitality above all other virtues.

From the Welsh point of view, the English were altogether different. They were a people bent on domination, and well-equipped to do so:

> It was now English, and not Norman, imperialism. The English language was supported by the power and prestige of a formidable state. The English people had been part of the Roman, the Danish and the Norman empires in their turn: now, however, they had their own English empire. To extend their authority over the lands, the resources and the people of other countries would be the passion which was to possess them for centuries to come.

Before the Norman conquest of England, the most powerful Welsh ruler at any given time was generally known as 'King of the Britons'; but in the 12th and 13th centuries, this title evolved into 'Prince of Wales', though only six Welsh leaders were recognised as such (or similar) by the English authorities. Gwynfor Evans is very proud of these Welshmen. Here is what he tells us about Llywelyn the Great (or Llywelyn Fawr), full name Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, (c. 1172 – 11 April 1240), who dominated most of Wales for 45 years:

> In 1194, Llywelyn defeated Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd in the Battle of Aberconwy (1194) and in 1197 he took away from him the whole of Perfeddwlad, that is, Rhos, Rhufoniog, Tegeingl and the Vale of Clwyd. In the first year of the new century he added Arfon, Anglesey and Arllechwedd; in 1201, Llynn; and in 1202 he placed his nephew Hywel in Meirionnydd. His authority stretched now from Dyfi to Dyfrdwy (Dee) bringing him face to face with Powys where Gwenwynwyn ruled the land between Tanat and Severn, the country called Powys Gwenwynwyn to distinguish it from Powys Fadog. John, king of England. John followed the classic imperial policy of pitting the strong against the weak, the principle of divide and rule. But the strength and wisdom of Llywelyn proved sufficient to frustrate him.

But Anglo-Gallic courtship ended in rape rather than marriage. Between 1276 and 1283, Edward I of England conquered Llywelyn the Last's powerbase in Gwynedd, in two brutal wars to which the English monarch devoted unprededented resources of men and money. Llywelyn was killed in battle, while his brother Dafydd was executed. Evans presents us with the unacceptable face of the Edwardian conquest, by relating the execution of Dafydd ap Gruffydd:

> Advantage was taken of the situation to teach the little conquered nation the nature of the higher civilisation it should in future have to bow to. On 3rd October, 1283, Prince Dafydd III was dragged by horses tails through the streets to the gallows; and there disembowelled before he died, and then hanged, drawn and quartered. In four large English towns a quarter of his body was exhibited: the people of London had the pleasure of seeing his head exhibited from the Tower beside that of Llywelyn his brother. It was a day of great merriment in London when Edward sent the head of the Prince on a pole through the streets of the capital. Clearly, the people who

had conquered the Welsh were men of superior culture and intellect.

The bitterness and irony of this lament echo down through the centuries.

After the Edwardian conquest, there were only three Welshmen who claimed the title of Prnce of Wales. The last of these was Owain Glyndwr, who we shall meet later. The others were Madog ap Llywelyn, a member of the house of Gwynedd, who nevertheless contrived to lead a nationwide revolt in 1294-5, defeated English forces near Denbigh and seized the supposedly impregnable Caernarfon Castle. The other was the far more celebrated Owain Lawgoch (known in England as Owen of the Red Hand, and in France as *Yvain de Galles*). Lawgoch is a footnote in English history – a pretentious loser who took a minor part in upsetting English plans in France; but in Welsh history, he is a significant and even legendary figure. Gwynfor Evans tells us that:

> There were Welsh soldiers fighting on both sides in France. A company of *Compagnons de Galles* went to Castile in 1366 to fight Pedro the Cruel. The captain of one of these companies was Owain Lawgoch, 'possibly the greatest military genius that Wales has produced'. In him the bards saw their *Mab Darogan* [Son of Destiny]. In 1365 he crossed to England, and perhaps to Wales, to claim his inheritance [and] persuaded a number of able Welshmen to join him… In 1369 an Anglesey man was executed for getting into contact with 'Owain Lawgoch, enemy and traitor' with a view to starting a war in Wales. In the same year Owain was given a fleet by Charles V, and sailed for Harfleur, but the ships were forced back to port by storms.
>
> In 1372 the French king gave him another navy and an army of four thousand men to win back his land. He made a proclamation announcing he was claiming Wales… The fleet sailed from Harfleur. It reached the island of Guernsey which it captured from the English; Owain's name remained alive on that island for a long time, in song and story. But while the free Wales navy was at sea, the navy of Spain was defeating the English navy near La Rochelle.
>
> In 1375 he took his company of four hundred men to Switzerland to fight against the Austrians. There he became a colourful figure in the legends of Berne, but it was now too dangerous for the English government to allow him to stay alive. Before another opportunity came for Owain to complete his Welsh mission he was murdered by an Englishman, John Lamb, who was in the pay of the English government. The assassin received £200 for his atrocious act.

A number of legends grew up around Owain Lawgoch. One story was that a Dafydd Meurig of Betws Bledrws was driving cattle from Cardiganshire to London. On the way he cut himself a hazel stick, and was still carrying it when he met a

stranger on London Bridge. The stranger asked Dafydd where he had cut the stick, and they both made their way back to Wales, to the place where the stick had been cut. The stranger told Dafydd to dig under the bush, and this revealed steps leading down to a cave illuminated by lamps, where a huge man with a red right hand was sleeping. The stranger told Dafydd that this was Owain Lawgoch "who sleeps until the appointed time. When he wakes he will be king of the Britons". He is commemorated at Mortagne-sur-Gironde, where he was assassinated.

The Gaelic Resurgence in Ireland

In P.S. O'Hegarty's works about Ireland, the central theme is once again that the Irish were a nation long before the Anglo-Saxons or the English came together as one or started to interfere in Ireland. This stands in stark contrast to the typical English histories of early medieval Ireland, which describe it as a complete mess, with numerous clans, sub-kings and clan chiefs competing for power in the four provinces, and often without a High King to rule them all. That is, until the whole situation was transformed by the English invasion of Henry II's reign, which is usually characterised as 'Norman' though, strictly speaking, Henry was an Angevin.

Historians of all nationalities are agreed, however, that the 14th and 15th centuries saw a waning of Anglo-Norman power in Ireland, and a 'Gaelic Resurgence' which saw the area under English rule contract to a small 'Pale' around Dublin. Unknown to most of us English, this Resurgence was led or triggered by one of the leaders of resistance to English rule in Scotland – Edward Bruce, brother of Robert.

Edward claimed descent from various Gaelic leaders, including Brian Boru. He and his brother Robert landed in Ulster with an army of Scottish veterans in 1315, the year after Bannockburn; and Edward proclaimed himself High King and established an administration in Ulster to rival its English counterpart in Dublin. The Bruces then conducted a highly destructive war against English or Norman rule in Ireland, which lasted for four years. At first the Scots/Irish alliance won battle after battle and gained control of most of Ireland; but by the beginning of 1317 famine had made it difficult to feed the army. King Robert returned to Scotland, though he promised continuing support. Edward Bruce remained.

The Anglo-Norman barons could do little to recover their position, since the famine made it difficult for them as well. Edward's Irish allies sent a Remonstrance, asking the Pope to revoke the bull *Laudabiliter*, by which his predecessor had backed the Plantagenet takeover in Ireland, 150 years before. They assured the Pope that:

> We have unanimously established and set [Edward Bruce] as our king and lord in our kingdom aforesaid, for in our judgment and the common judgment of men he is pious and prudent, humble and chaste, exceedingly

> temperate, in all things sedate and moderate, and possessing power (God on high be praised) to snatch us mightily from the house of bondage with the help of God and our own justice, and very willing to render to everyone what is due to him of right, and above all is ready to restore entirely to the Church in Ireland the possessions and liberties.

This 'Grand Remonstrance' damned the Anglo-Norman settlers because

> The English inhabiting our land ... are so different in character from the English of England... that with the greatest propriety they may be called a nation not of medium, but of utmost, perfidy.

In the event, the Papacy neither recognised Edward Bruce's claim, nor agreed with the Remonstrance, and his rule in Ireland therefore remained illegitimate in the eyes of the Church. Then, in the late summer of 1318, the Englishman Sir John de Bermingham marched against Bruce and, on 14 October 1318, the Scots-Irish army was badly defeated at the Battle of Faughart. Edward was killed, his body being quartered and sent to various towns in Ireland, and his head was delivered to King Edward II, rather Dafydd ap Grufydd's (and William Wallace's) had been.

Edward Bruce was not universally popular, even amongst the Gaelic Irish. The Annals of Ulster summed up the view that he had not only failed to drive the settlers out, but that he had reduced the country to a state of barbarism:

> For there came death and loss of people during his time in all Ireland in general for the space of three years and a half and people undoubtedly used to eat each other throughout Ireland.

This is not how P.S.O'Hegarty saw it. For him the Bruce episode was crucial in the history of the struggle for Irish liberty:

> The three years uprooted the colonists over almost the whole of Ireland, exhausted the Anglo-Irish nobles, and so weakened English power in Ireland that it lessened until only Dublin was held. By throwing together every available man, and by hard fighting, the English had preserved their grip on Ireland. Yet, for two centuries thereafter, English power in Ireland was almost negligible. It declined rapidly until it was almost at vanishing point, and it did not flourish again until the Tudors took up the running.

O'Hegarty had a point. By the central decades of the 14th century even the English governments in London and Dublin though that the Norman and English settlers in Ireland were in deep trouble, because (in their eyes) they had become too like the native Irish. The response, in 1366, was to enact the Statutes of Kilkenny, which began by reciting the mischief the legislation was aimed at:

> Now many English of the said land, forsaking the English language, manners, mode of riding, laws and usages, live and govern themselves according to the manners, fashion, and language of the Irish enemies; and also have made divers marriages and alliances between themselves and the Irish enemies aforesaid; whereby the said land, and the liege people thereof, the English l anguage, the allegiance due to our lord the king, and the English laws there, are put in subjection and decayed...

The aim of the new legislation was to halt this 'decay' - the adoption by the English of Irish ways – by introducing a kind of apartheid, as was done in Wales fifty years later, after Glyndwr's revolt. The statutes of Kilkenny forbade intermarriage between native Irish and native English; the English fostering of Irish children; the English adoption of Irish children and use of Irish names and dress. English colonists who did not know how to speak English were required to learn the language (on pain of losing their land and property). The Irish sport of hurling was to be dropped, in favour of archery. Statute XV even forbade Irish minstrels or storytellers from coming into English areas, because they might be "Irish agents who come amongst the English, spy out the secrets, plans, and policies of the English". Further: "No Englishman worth one hundred shillings a year in land, holdings or rent shall ride otherwise than on the saddle in the English style."

The new coercive policy does not seem to have worked. There is a revealing record of what the English thought about the Irish in the 1390s in Froissart's Chronicles. The chronicler recorded a meeting with Henry Crystede, who had been held prisoner in Ireland for seven years. According to him, the Irish were very different from the English in all sorts of ways: their way of making war, their table manners, the way in which they dressed, and their attitude to chivalry:

> The Irish hide in the woods and forests, where they live in holes dug under trees, or in bushes and thickets, like wild animals….They carry sharp knives, with a big double-edged blade, like the head of a throwing-spear, with which they kill their enemies. And they never leave a man for dead until they have cut his throat like a sheep and slit open his belly to remove the heart, which they take away. Some, who know their ways, say that they eat it with great relish…
>
> They do not wear breeches. So I had a large quantity of linen drawers made and had them sent to the kings and their servants. I taught them to wear them and during the time I spent with them I cured them of many boorish and unseemly habits, both in dress and in other things. It was only with great difficulty that I got them to ride on the kind of saddles we have…
>
> I asked them if they were willing to enter the order of chivalry, saying that the King of England wished to knight them, as is the custom

> in France and England and other countries. They replied that they were knights already and that that should be quite good enough.

Similarly, in 1397 Ramon, Viscount of Perellós, travelled from Catalonia to Lough Derg in the north-west of Ireland, in order to visit a shrine called St Patrick's Purgatory. He was told to expect a 'savage, ungoverned people', and was pleasantly surprised to find that he could discuss international affairs with O'Neill and his courtiers in Latin. Nevertheless, his report sometimes reads as if he were visiting a zoo:

> They consider their own customs to be more advantageous than any others in the whole world… The poor wear cloaks, good or bad. The queen was barefoot, and her handmaidens, twenty in number, were dressed with their shameful parts showing. And you should know that all those people were no more ashamed of this than showing their faces. (Jonathan Bardon)

CHAPTER SIX

WILLIAM REES-MOGG & THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

It's Waterloo! It's Crécy! It's Agincourt! We win all these things!

Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, October 2017

Jacob Rees-Mogg MP has repeatedly compared parliamentary decision to trigger Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, and thereby ensure that the UK should leave the EU, with the Battle of Agincourt, as a defining moment in 'our' history. This is a curious remark, since the result of the referendum held in 2016 was not so much a victory over a foreign power, as a victory of one body of British opinion over another. (Incidentally, Polly Toynbee remarked that Brexit reminded her more of Dunkirk, than Agincourt). It is doubly inappropriate to compare Brexit with Agincourt, because Agincourt was an English victory, not a British one. And when Rees-Mogg also told his loyal supporters that 'We win all these things!', one could be forgiven for thinking he had been studying rhetoric, rather history.

While 'we' English undoubtedly won at Agincourt, we also lost the Battles of Patay (1429), Formigny (1450) and Castillon (1453) and, more importantly, we lost the Hundred Years' War. Meanwhile, Owain Lawgoch, the Welsh Prince of Wales, had assisted the French in the 14th century, and the Scots were their allies throughout the long War. After Agincourt, the Scots sent whole armies to assist the French. and in 1421 they helped their allies to defeat the English at the Battle of Baugé, where Henry V's brother, Clarence, was killed. Thereafter the *Garde Écossaise* remained a permanent part of the French royal army. In these circumstances, how can it be right to invoke Agincourt in the British context?

Like many English people, Rees-Mogg probably got his history from Shakespeare. In his play *Henry V*, Captains Jamy, MacMorris and 'Fluellen' – a Scotsman, an Irishman and a Welshman – have starring roles; but this was done for dramatic effect and bears no resemblance to the facts. The supposed Irish involvement was non-existent. Ireland had been slipping from the English grasp for decades and Henry V did little to reverse this. The Irish writer who compiled the *Annals of Loch Cé* does not even mention Agincourt, though he recorded a local battle

when Talbot defeated some local Gaelic chiefs, noting that the Englishman took the opportunity to 'plunder many of the poets of Erinn'.

Scotland presented a different kind of threat. As we have noted, the Scots were a fiercely independent kingdom, allied with the French and disposed to invade the North of England whenever the opportunity arose. So Henry V had to leave forces in the marches to ensure that the Scots did not cause trouble for him at home. The Scottish chronicler Walter Bower was very hostile to Henry and all his achievements. Ironically, the only Scotsman thought to have celebrated Henrys' victory at Agincourt was the Scots King, but this was because he was a captive in England at the time and had little choice.

Agincourt is often said to have been a Welsh victory. This is what we might conclude from a reading of Michael Cox's children's novel *Jenkin Lloyd* (2007); and even Gwynfor Evans subscribed to the view that the Welsh archers played an important part in Henry V's victory. But, although some Welshmen certainly distinguished themselves at Agincourt, the idea that the Welsh played a dominant role is a myth. Anne Curry has pointed out that only as many archers were recruited in South Wales as in Lancashire, and that none were recruited in North Wales, whose loyalty was still in doubt in 1415 – though it is only right to say that she has received hate mail for saying this.

A Decisive Victory?

Henry V had a propaganda machine, and wanted the anniversary of the battle to be remembered; but he felt obliged to consulted with the Church as to how this could most suitably be done. The problem was that there were several competing candidates for veneration. 25 October was the Feast of Saints Crispin and Crispinian, but it was also special to St John of Beverley, who had the advantage of being English (or at any rate Anglo-Saxon) and was an important focus of loyalty in the North of England. It was said that the shrine at Beverley had oozed drops of holy oil, resembling sweat, on the day that Agincourt was fought, which indicated the great exertions which the Saint had made in Heaven on behalf of the English army.

So it was that on 16 December 1416 Henry ordered the Bishop of London to celebrate the feasts of all three Saints on 25 October each year, throughout his diocese and in perpetuity, in commemoration. The Bishop duly referred to the battle in extravagant terms.

> O inexpressible consolation, above all in our own time, but in all times worthy of rejoicing, and always to be remembered, THE FAVOURABLE VICTORY of our most Christian Prince Henry V King of England and his army AT THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT, recently won in the district of Picardy.

Similar instructions were issued throughout the South of England, indeed all parts of the country forming part of the Archdiocese of Canterbury. At the same time, Henry V's spokesmen milked Agincourt for all that it was worth, when addressing Parliament. He told the Parliament which sat in March 1416 that God had now intervened in the long war on each of three occasions, and every time he had favoured the English: at Sluys (the great naval battle off Flanders in 1340), at Poitiers in 1356 and now "on the field at Agincourt". However, Agincourt Day did not find a lasting place in the Christian calendar in England, at least not outside the Church and the cloister. It was certainly never as important as Queen Elizabeth's (Accession) Day became in the late sixteenth century, or as Guy Fawkes's Day has been since 1605. There was no national celebration in October 1515, or on any later centenary, prior to 2015.

Agincourt was famous for a while; but was it decisive? In my view, its importance has been grossly exaggerated by the English. It was not a victory to be compared with Hastings in 1066, or with the French King Philip II's victory at Bouvines in 1214. French schoolboys whom I knew in the 1960s had never heard of Agincourt, or for that matter of Crécy or Poitiers, but they had all heard of Bouvines, and also of Fashoda (1898), which is scarcely remembered here. Agincourt was not even decisive in terms of Henry V's conquest of northern France; and it certainly did not mean a lot in European terms.

In the early 15th century the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund was the greatest ruler in the Christian West. Though few English people have ever heard of him, his fifty-year reign overlapped with those of numerous English and French kings. His dominions stretched from the Baltic to the Mediterranean and from the Rhône to the Black Sea; and they included what we now know the Czech Republic. Though he could not drive the Turks out of Europe, Sigismund was able to contain them, at a time when they presented a real danger to Christendom. We forget that, after Nicopolis, the Ottoman Sultan had threatened to march on Rome and 'let his horse eat corn upon St Peter's altar'; and that Mehmet I, whose reign more or less coincided with Henry V's, is honoured in Turkey as 'the second founder of the Ottoman Empire'.

If Sigismund ever heard of Henry's death-bed wish to re-conquer Jerusalem, he might have concluded that the English king had got his priorities badly wrong. From Sigismund's point of view, little enough came of the pledges of mutual assistance, except that at the Council of Constance (which sat between 1414 and 1418), Anglo-German co-operation resulted in the election of a new Pope, Martin V. The Great Schism was thereby healed; but it is difficult to see why some historians write of this as changing European politics, let alone the 'balance of power' (surely an eighteenth century concept, if ever there was one).

From the English point of view, the main success at the Council of Constance, was a very one, since it saw the vindication of England's right to sit as a separate 'nation', when we had previously sat with the Germans. In the late eighteenth century Edward Gibbon thought that the English delegation won this new right by

the force of rhetoric, but also because 'the victories of Henry V added much weight' to their arguments; and the point has been repeated ever since, without always being carefully examined. Yet, when we look at what actually happened at Constance, it is hard to detect the influence of Agincourt. The most prominent members of the English delegation were Robert Hallum, Bishop of Salisbury and Thomas Polton, Bishop of Worcester. They seem to have deployed several (mostly spurious) arguments for separate English representation, based on the size, geography, history and languages used in Britain; but neither Agincourt nor the Anglo-French war in was referred to. Indeed it was unlikely that a battle would be mentioned in an international gathering, composed largely of priests and Churchmen. In any case the English success at Constance was shortlived: during the Council of Basle held between (1431-1449), the practice of sitting as nations was abandoned.

Henry V was an orthodox Roman Catholic and an enthusiastic persecutor of heretics, and in particular the Lollards. In the Parliament of 1420 the Lord Chancellor praised him, not only for his military achievements ini France, but for 'the destruction and crushing of heresies and Lollardy here within the kingdom'; but Pope Martin V did not believe that the heresy was no longer a danger. When he wrote to the English Church in 1428 (urging it to contribute to the crusade he was authorising against the Hussites in Bohemia) he said:

> This wretched and terrible heresy has its roots there [in England] and has created so much scandal and evil throughout Christendom. For the sake of your honour and reputation the English ought to give this matter the highest priority. There exist in England not a few offshoots of this heresy which will continue to grow up quite significantly if they are not quickly cut down. One wonders if England may not suffer the same fate as Bohemia. Similarly we have been informed by a reliable source that frequently representatives of the Wycliffites, hiding in England, go to Bohemia to strengthen them [the Hussites] in their pestiferous ways.
>
> .

There were other events which were more significant than Agincourt, so far as other European states were concerned. In 1410 a Polish-Lithuanian army had defeated the Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg in East Prussia, while in 1415 Sigismund granted Brandenberg to the house of Hohenzollern. The former brought 200 years of German expansion in the East to a halt, whilst the latter was the first stage in the rise to power of one of the most powerful dynasties of modern times. Also in 1415, a Portuguese expedition set sail for North Africa. Leaving home on July 24, it captured Ceuta by assault on 21 August. The Battle of Ceuta was hailed by the Council in Constance as a victory for the whole of Christendom, since the port had been in Muslim hands for 700 years. It remains in Iberian hands to this day, though it is also still claimed by Morocco.

Henry VI's View

The French prisoners taken at Agincourt posed a particular problem for Henry VI, when he declared that his minority was at an end in 1437. By 1440, the most important prisoner, Charles Duke of Orléans had been in English custody for twenty-five years and Henry, who was a pious man, thought it was time to release him. The difficulty was that, on his deathbed, Henry V had expressly ordered that the Duke should not be released unless and until the whole of France had been reduced to obedience. The young king's advisers therefore issued a broadsheet in his name, justifying the proposal on the grounds of humanity as well as expediency.

Henry VI's declaration is an extraordinary document. It took a very realistic (some would have said, pessimistic – even 'unpatriotic'?) view of the progress of the war. It had been going on for a hundred years. Even Edward III had not managed to make himself King there, for all his many victories on the battlefield; and so, he had settled for an 'easy part' of the kingdom at Brétigny. In any case, it was simply impossible to conquer the whole of the French kingdom: it was too 'ample, great, and so mighty in multitude of walled towns, castles and fortresses, in rivers and strong counties'. Most strikingly, Henry VI claimed that

> The king's father, had by him and by his victorious battle of Agincourt, and other battles...by water and by the land, so prospered by the conduct of the said war...yet not long time before his death... he was so *sadded* of the war and disposed in all wises, to have entended to a peace to have been treated and made...

Of course, the son could not possibly have spoken with the father, about the war or anything else. Henry VI had been less than twelve months old when Henry V died; and it is unlikely that he would have been fed these ideas by his uncles of Bedford or Gloucester, who were both stubborn old warhorses. It is much more likely that Henry VI's was giving voice to his own ideas; but Henry V's prestige was still so great that, even when he argued for peace, the new King had to invoke the memory of Agincourt.

At the time, Henry VI could not be accused directly of 'talking the country down'. Officially, the King could do no wrong, because his office was semi-sacred. The most his opponents could normally do was to attack and remove his 'evil counsellors'; but in Henry VI's case, those opposed to his peace policy did eventually resort to arms, and he was ultimately deposed.

A Sustaining Myth

Shakespeare's *Henry V* was first staged in 1599, when England was still threatened by Spain, despite the defeat of the Armada some nine years before. As we have already noted, he took great liberties with the facts, including the plot. He telescoped the five years after Agincourt into just one month. The action shifted directly from Agincourt to Henry's marriage to the daughter of Charles VI and the Treaty of Troyes in 1422. He thereby omitted Henry's conquest of Normandy after 1417 and the murder of the Duke of Burgundy in 1419, which were just as important as the battle itself in deciding the fate of the French kingdom. But Shakespeare wrote wonderfully compelling drama; and, though he was not the first to invent speeches for his principal character, he was the first to turn them into unforgettable poetry. Michelet thought that he was as great an historian as Tacitus.

The result was that Shakespeare created both a national hero and a myth. The hero was Henry V, though in Elizabethan times England was an enthusiastically Protestant country, whereas Henry had been an enthusiastic persecutor of the Lollards, thought by some Elizabethans to be proto-Protestants. The myth was that a numerically inferior, but highly motivated, army can prevail against all the odds. This has periodically provided great comfort to the English, and even the British, in time of war. For all the criticisms the play has received, *Henry V* continues to delight the audience, at least when conventionally produced. Indeed, when the writer saw Mark Rylance in the play at the newly-restore *Globe* theatre in Southwark in the mid 1990s, the jingoism displayed by the modern-day groundlings was positively embarrassing, given the cosmopolitan nature of some parts of the audience.

Yet historians began to deconstruct the patriotic myth in the 18th century. In his *Essay at removing national prejudicies against a union with Scotland* (1706) Daniel Defoe implicitly downgraded Agincourt, by referring to the fact that France had soon 'recovered herself' under Charles VII, by courtesy of her alliance with the Scots. The Scottish philosopher David Hume emphasized the importance of the civil war in France and the 'utmost imprudence' of the French commanders in explaining English military success, and considered that Henry V had taken an unacceptably high degree of risk.

The readiness to criticise Henry's conduct in literary circles was offset by the growth of a new kind of military history after 1815, as British soldiers returned home after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. 400 years had now elapsed between the English victory and the British one; but the two places are only 100 miles apart and some officers and soldiers who had fought at Waterloo had their medals presented to them on the battlefield at Azincourt. Sir Harris Nicolas's book on Agincourt set new standards. His judgments were firmly based on the sources, and he included copious extracts from original documents; but he was by no means an uncritical admirer of Henry V. In his view, Henry displayed a fair degree of 'falsehood, hypocrisy and impiety' during the Agincourt campaign.

Nevertheless, English pride in the deeds of Henry V continued to be demonstrated throughout Victorian times. Lord Macaulay (1800-59) liked to recall that he had been born on Agincourt day; the Royal Navy had a succession of battleships called *HMS Agincourt*; and there were three productions of Shakespeare's *Henry V* in 1900-01 alone.

The Great War of 1914-18 dwarfed all previous wars in which England and the United Kingdom had been involved. The Kaiser's Germany was more populous than Britain, and she had already outstripped her in terms of industrial production. She had recently constructed a Fleet which was comparable with the Royal Navy; and she possessed an enormous conscript army, whereas the British had only a small professional force – reportedly dismissed by the Kaiser as 'a contemptible little army'. It was therefore predictable that, when war came, productions of *Henry V* would be staged. Sir Frank Benson (1858-1939), who was the most famous actor-manager of his day, revived it and for the performance on Boxing Day 1914 he incorporated a specially rousing Chorus. *The Times* noted that Benson's own performance as Henry was 'marked by an unwonted fervour.' In 1915 Eric Williams produced a film entitled *England's Warrior King*, which featured men from the Royal Scots Greys regiment, stationed at York.

In August 1914 The German Army ran into the British Expeditionary Force at Mons in Belgium, around 70 miles from the village of Azincourt. Vastly outnumbered, the B.E.F. gave an honourable account of itself, but was forced to retreat. This was the setting for a short story by Arthur Machen entitled *The Bowmen*, which was published in *The Evening News*. This tells how 80,000 British troops are attacked by 300,000 Germans, armed with the most modern weaponry, including artillery. The British fight desperately but are eventually compelled to conclude that all is lost. Then one of the British soldiers remembers a Latin motto, *Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius* – 'may St. George be a present help to the English'. As soon as he pronounces these words, he hears shouting, louder than thunder: *Array, array, array!; St. George! St. George! St. George for Merry England!* And, as he turns to look, he sees, beyond the trench, a long line of shapes, with a shining around them. It turns out that these are the bowmen of Agincourt, arriving to help their beleaguered compatriots and descendants. The bowmen use their longbows to shoot down the German hordes in droves.

There was widespread reaction against war in all its forms after 1918. George Bernad Shaw (1856-1950) disliked the fact that Shakespeare had 'thrust such a Jingo hero as Harry V down our throats', while the critic Max Beerbohm (1872-1956) considered *Henry V* 'the mere hackwork of genius'. In 1920 Gerald Gould published an article in *The English Review* which argued that the play had been misunderstood. It was actually intended, said Gould, to be an attack on medieval chivalry, rather than a celebration of it. For whatever reason, *Henry V* ceased to be part of the normal theatrical repertoire in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet *The Agincourt Song*, arranged by Gerrard Williams, appeared as the first item in the *Daily Express Song Book* published in 1927.

Hitler's Germany presented an even greater threat to Britain than the Kaiser's Germany had done. Laurence Olivier had performed the role of *Henry V* on stage at *The Old Vic* in 1937; but, during the Second World War, he entertained the troops with a one-man show which included extracts from Henry V's speeches. As he later explained

> By the time I got to 'God for Harry' I think they would have followed me anywhere. I don't think we could have won the war without 'Once more unto the breach …' somewhere in our soldier's hearts.

In 1944 Churchill instructed Olivier to make a film of *Henry V* as morale-boosting propaganda for the British troops who were preparing to invade Normandy although, by the time the film was released, D-Day had already come and gone. Olivier's film was dedicated 'To the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture.' It took even more liberties with the truth even than Shakespeare's text had; but it was a tremendous success, both critically and with the public. And it altered the perception of Agincourt for a generation.

A few years later, Churchill himself wrote his bestselling *History of the Engish Speaking Peoples*, and heaped extravagant praise on Henry V's shoulders:

> [After Agincourt] Henry V stood at the summit of the world; and ascended without dispute the throne not only of England, but very soon of almost all Western Christendom.

What on earth did Churchill mean? Specifically, that Henry married the daughter of the King of France; that he persuaded the Queen of Naples to adopt his brother Bedford as her heir; that he arranged for his brother Gloucester to marry Jacqueline of Hainault. For Churchill the result was that 'the pedigrees of southern and western Europe alike met in the house of Lancaster, the head of which thus seemed to be the common head of all'; but, when we examine the threads of Churchill's dynastic tapestry, we find that there was no master weaver at work. It is true that Henry V married Catherine of Valois in 1420; but Joanna II, the childless Queen of Naples (1414-35) only considered adopting the Duke of Bedford as her heir for a short while (in March 1419), when she was in desperate need of support. She turned away from England the next year, before performing a complete volte-face and finally looking to France for protection. As for the marriage between the Duke of Gloucester and Jacqueline of Hainault, this may have been planned by Henry V but it took place after his death and was much disapproved of by the Regent Bedford, since it seriously compromised England's alliance with Burgundy.

In the last 30 years, historians have been more realistic, and less willing to agree with Churchill about the significance of Henry V's remarkable career. On the whole, they have tended to agree with his son's view of Agincourt instead. The late

Maurice Keen, who was a great admirer of Henry V's many talents, nevertheless questioned his judgment, in an essay he contirubted to *The Practice of Kingship* (1988):

> [Henry] had high ambitions and great gifts; it is not quite so clear that he was the kind of man who could think through to the end, where these were leading him.

In *Shaping the Nation,England 1360-1461* (2005) Gerald Harriss summarised the position this way:

> The myth of Agincourt was never forgotten, nor was Henry V's vision ever condemned. That has been left to historians, who have judged the whole enterprise flawed and to have left a *damnosa hereditas* for his successor. In military terms, this is justified.

Rival Princes of Wales

Henry V was Henry IV's eldest son. He was born in Monmouth in 1386 or 1387 (non-one is quite sure which) and became Prince of Wales when his father became King in 1399. That is about his only claim to be Welsh. On the other hand, many Welsh people regard Owain Glyndŵr as their last native Prince. Owain was proclaimed Prince of Wales in 1404, held parliaments at Machynlleth and ruled over large parts of the Principality during his long revolt, which lasted from 1400 until 1415 (when Henry V took his army to Normandy on the campain which ended at Agincourt).

Most of Henry V's military experience was gained in campaigns against Glyndwr. He had accompanied Richard II's second expedition to Ireland in 1399, but was only some 13 years' old at the time, and not much older when he was given nominal command in Scotland the following year. He was Captain of Calais from 1410, but there was no fighting there at the time and he did not participate in the French expeditions of 1411 and 1412. On the other hand, he is thought to have been in Wales more or less every year between 1401 and 1408. Indeed Mowat (1919) regarded this as his 'school of war', while Hutchison (1967) and Christopher Allmand (1992) both argued that his presence contributed to the success of English arms in Wales, and that this was the foundation of his later success in France. In 1987 Desmond Seward wrote that:

> Henry V's Welsh wars prepared him for the conquest of France. He learnt siegecraft and gunnery... also how to control large areas of conquered territory by carefully sited small garrisons – using systematic famine and calculated conciliation to hold down the hostile population.

There are those who disagree. T.B. Pugh (1988) thought that Henry's part in fighting the Welsh rebels had been exaggerated. Likewise, Anne Curry (2005) tells us that Prince Henry's career in Wales was 'not particularly successful'. She concedes that the Welsh were more formidable adversaries than anyone had expected but thinks that Henry's military experience was limited to 'small-scale inconclusive campaigns against guerrillas' and regards his failure to take Aberystwyth, at the end of the first siege in 1407, as sheer incompetence. Nevertheless, it must be accepted that Henry V was at least nominally in charge, when his father's armies crushed the Welsh Prince of Wales in the field, and Glyndwr fled to the mountains.

How Welsh was Glyndwr? Almost 200 years after his death, Shakespeare – who had his own agenda - portrayed Owain as having an English upbringing but a Welsh character. 'Owen Glendower' appears in *Henry IV*, Part I as a would-be wizard and soothsayer who bores Hotspur with his stories of:

Of the moldwarp and the ant,
Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies;
And of a dragon, and a finless fish,
A clip-wing'd griffin, and a moulten raven,
A couching lion, and a ramping cat.

In addition, Glendower tells Mortimer that he can '*call spirits from the vasty deep'.* To which his phlegmatic English ally replies as follows:

Why, so can I, and so can any other man!
But will they come when you summon them?

Gwynfor Evans also pointed out that Shakespeare's Glendower tells the audience that he was

trained up in an English court
Where being but young, I fram'd to the harp
Many an English ditty, lovely well,
And gave the tongue an helpful ornament.

However, the Welsh poet Iolo Goch (c.1320-c.1398) described Owain Glyndwr's home at Sycharth as a centre of Welsh, rather than English, culture. He tells us about:

A baron's hall, a place of generosity
Where many poets came and life was good.

Glyndwr was also a doughty freedom fighter for Wales. Even H.E.Marshall wrote favourably about this aspect of his character, while accommodating his career within her grand imperial narrative:

> Owen Glendower now rebelled against Henry. He called himself the Prince of Wales, claiming to be descended from Llewellyn, that Welsh prince whom Edward I had defeated and killed…..Henry [V] next marched against Owen Glendower, but still he could not subdue him. Owen fought against Henry all his life, and at last died among the lonely mountains of Wales, still free and still unconquered.

What Marshall did not say was that, as the English Prince of Wales (a.k.a. Henry V) pursued the Welsh one, he put the latter's estates at Sycharth and Glyndwfrdwy in North Wales to the torch; and that the mansion house at Sycharth has remained a ruin to this day.

Glyndwr's revolt was the single most important rising against English rule in Welsh history; and the English Parliament reacted by enacting a set of penal laws, which subjected the entire Welsh people to a form of apartheid. These laws stayed on the statute book until the reign of James VI & I. Though they were only enforced intermittently, they were greatly resented, as Evans again explains:

> In the princedoms there was a feeling of great bitterness over the continuation of the harsh penal laws, which deprived the Welsh of the rights of the ordinary civilians, making them second-class citizens in their own country. No Welshman could own property within a borough, nor near one; he could not hold a position under the crown in Wales or in England; he could not be a juror, nor secure justice in a court under his own oath; no Welshman ought to marry an Englishwoman, nor a Welsh woman an Englishman. Englishmen administered the law and filled all the high posts.

` We have little idea what Owain Glyndwr looked like; but there are three very different statues of him, in different parts of Wales. The first, in marble, is in Cardiff City Hall and was unveiled by David Lloyd George in 1916. This was before the foundation of *Plaid Cymru* and long before devolution: Lloyd George was about to embark upon six-years as British Prime Minister. Owain is portrayed as a statesman, with parchment in hand; and he is in no way a threat to the English. The second statue, in the small town of Corwen in Denbighshire, is a life-size bronze equestrian portrait, installed in September 2007. This clearly belongs to the modern age, when *Plaid Cymru* plays a prominent role in the Welsh Assembly and Welsh politics. Glyndŵr snarls defiance at us - particularly one feels, those of us who are English; but he is a still a knight in armour, astride a caparisoned warhorse. The third, much smaller, statue (again in bronze) is in the village of Pennal, where Owain wrote his famous letter to the King of France in 1406. It stands in the Princes' Memorial

Garden, created in 2004, where the Princes commemorated are the Welsh Princes of Wales, not the English holders of that office. Owain now presents himself as a guerrilla, infantryman and freedom fighter; and his surcoat which bears the symbols of wizardry.

These statues reflect different traditions in Welsh historiography. The first and second are representative of the Liberal-progressive school, for whom Glyndŵr was the father of modern Wales, since he advocated the establishment of a Welsh Parliament, a reformed Welsh Church, and Welsh Universities. The third represents the nationalist school, for whom Glyndŵr personifies the struggle for independence. To my mind it also represents the many legends about Owain, who was supposed to have magical powers. Even today (according to Denbighshire County Council's guide *Exploring Corwen*) there is a legend that he never died, but lies sleeping somewhere, like Arthur, and Owain Lawgoch, ever ready to answer his country's call.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TUDOR MONARCHS & THE NATION STATE

The Tudor, and in particular the Elizabethan Age, was a golden one for Puritans like Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), and it continued to be one for many Englishmen and women who were aware of their history. Around 1900 the conventional wisdom was that Henry VII put an end to the Wars of the Roses, introduced new men into government and first showed an interest in trade; that Henry VIII deserved to be called 'Henry the Great' because he broke with Rome, built a Navy and defended the Island against all comers; and, above all that Eizabeth avoided the Wars of Religion which brought France to its knees and fought off the attentions of Catholic Spain at the time of the 'Invincible' Armada.

In the 20th century, English academic historians pointed out the shortcomings of this nationalistic narrative. It was shown that Henry VII was little more than a typical 'medieval' monarch, that Henry VIII was a hypocrite, who broke with Rome and dissolved the monasteries for personal reasons, and dealt with his opponents in an especially ruthless way, whilst even the great Elizabeth's ministers were zealous persecutors. In these ways, the traditional Protestant narrative has been displaced by the traditionally Catholic. However, none of this seems to have penetrated popular consciousness. In the English mind's eye, Henry VIII is still seen as a loveable, though very rough, sort of rogue, while Elizabeth is still a saviour of the nation.

Henry VII

In his *Short History of the English People* (1876) the popular historian J.R.Green wrote about the emergence of a 'new monarchy' in 1485. He suggested that Henry Tudor restored power and authority to a Crown weakened by 'bastard feudalism' and civil war. A.F. Pollard (1869-1948) developed this idea, emphasised the Tudor dynasty's creation of the nation state, and drew a parallel with the 'new monarchiess' in France and in Spain. One aspect of looking at the history in this way was the development of the idea that the first two members of the Tudor dynasty presided over a new despotism, whereas their Lancastrians predecessors had in some way been constitutionalists.

Modern historians seem to have lost the taste for such grand theories. In *The Winter King, Henry VII and the Dawn of Tudor England* (2012) Thomas Penn portrays

the first Tudor monarch as an old-fashioned tyrant, similar in many respects to King John (r. 1199-1216) – who has long been regarded as a 'bad' king. At the time, Henry Tudor made the most of his Welsh ancestry (although, like Henry V, his claim to Welshness was fairly thin). H.E.Marshall certainly bought this idea:

> With Henry Tudor a new race of kings began to reign in England. For more than three hundred years the kings of England had been Plantagenets. With Richard III the last of the Platagenets died, for the Tudors were Welsh and claimed to be descended from ancient British princes who, you remember, were driven into Wales when the Saxons took possession of England. (from *Our Island Story* by H. E. Marshall)

Henry VII's claim to Welsh ancestry was opportunistic, in view of his need for military support in Wales. When Jasper and Henry Tudor sailed from France in 1485, they headed there, with an army of around 2,000 Welsh, Bretons and Frenchmen and, even according to Welsh historians, Henry 'succeeded in doing what Owain Lawgoch had failed to do', by landing in Milford Haven, as capturing Pembroke castle, and marching onwards into England, flying the Red Dragon as he did so. Three centuries earlier, Geoffrey of Monmouth had told how two dragons, one white and one red, had fought at the court of King Vortigern, and how the white dragon (which represented the Saxons) had made the other fly to the end of a lake. At this point Vortigern had asked Merlin to say what all this meant. Merlin had then foretold the Anglo-Saxon conquest of much of Britain:

> Woe to the red dragon, for his banishment hasteneth on. His lurking holes shall be seized by the white dragon, which signifies the Saxons whom you invited over; but the red denotes the British nation, which shall be oppressed by the white. Therefore shall its mountains be levelled as the valleys, and the rivers of the valleys shall run with blood. The exercise of religion shall be destroyed, and churches be laid open to ruin.

Fortunately for the Britons (or the Welsh), Merlin also told how they would come into their own one day, when a great general and ruler (Arthur) arrived:

> At last the oppressed shall prevail, and oppose the cruelty of foreigners. For a boar of Cornwall shall give his assistance, and trample their necks under his feet. The islands of the ocean shall be subject to his power, and he shall possess the forests of Gaul.

It was no coincidence that, when Henry Tudor married Elizabeth of York, he named their first child Arthur; and it was this Prince Arthur who became Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall, and married Katherine of Aragon, before his untimely death in 1502.

In his address to the Welsh leaders Henry VII stressed his determination to restore 'our said principality of Wales and the people of the same to their former liberties; and the Viennese ambassador (for one) was convinced that the Tudor dynasty's takeover in England would be good for Wales: 'For the Welsh,' he wrote, 'it can now be said that they have won back their old independence, for Henry VII is a Welshman, a fortunate and wise Welshman.' English historians have continued to view matters in much the same way. HAL Fisher wrote this about Henry's defeat of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth:

> This victory, by ending the civil war, enabled England to pursue the policy it had dutifully followed since the Norman Conquest but which the French wars had deflected. Once the forlorn attempt to conquer France was definitely abandoned, England was able to find her true line of development in the enlargement of her influence over the British Isles.

But this is not how the Welsh see it. At least not all Welsh, all of the time. Gwynfor Evans was much more inclined to question the advantages of a Welsh succession in England, for Wales itself:

> For England, and for the English people, a bright future of national development opened out under the Tudors. This big nation had the freedom to realise its possibilities, while Wales slipped into the position of a submissive province of England, unprosperous and insignificant.

Henry VIII

Pollard believed that Henry VIII was an unsung hero, who ought to have been called 'Great', along with Alfred; Geoffrey Elton believed that it was during Henry VIII's time that England became a modern state. The historian David Starkey and the novelist Hilary Mantel have turned the focus back onto personalities. In 2008, Starkey compared the young Henry to the newly-elected President Barack Obama, because he looked good and had charisma. In particular, Henry tried to appeal to the Welsh and those English who were interested in history, by associating himself with the legend of King Arthur and his knights. In 1522 he had the ancient round table at Winchester painted for the first time, and commissioned a portrait of himself as King Arthur, seated at the head of the table.

Father John Lingard described the older Henry in very different terms:

> [Henry] became as rapacious as he was prodigal; as obstinate as he was capricious; as fickle in his friendships **as** he was merciless in his resentments. Though liberal of his confidence, be soon grew suspicious of those whom he had trusted… When he ascended the throne, there still existed a spirit of

> freedom, which on more than one occasion defeated the arbitrary measures of the court; but in the lapse of a few years that spirit had fled, and before the death of Henry, the king of England had grown into a despot, the people had shrunk into a nation of slaves.

Henry's claim to lasting fame (or infamy) lies in the break with Rome, the 'hard exit' from papal jurisdiction, which he brought about by means of the Act in Restraint of Appeals of 1533. This came about, not because Henry was in any sense a Protestant, but because he wanted a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, which the Pope would not grant him; and (as we shall see) because the English Parliament resented foreign interference in English law and affairs.

After the Norman Conquest, two systems of law became established in England, each with its own courts. The first was the common law (which the judges gradually evolved from a mass of competing custom), the second was the canon law, or law of the Church. Men and women in holy orders were entitled to be judged according to the second of these, but it also governed the laity in relation to 'spiritual' matters, which included family law, wills and succession. Appeal lay from the Church courts to Rome, and from 1066 to the middle of the fourteenth century, Papal jurisdiction had expanded inexorably, with the Roman *curia* hearing ever more appeals. Henry VIII had to go to Rome in his vain attempt to obtain a divorce, but he was only the most prominent (and embarrassing) example of the inconvenience, expense and delay which the litigant might suffer, as a result of the variety of jurisdictions to which he might be subject.

The Act in Restraint of Appeals was a kind of Brexit, in that it ended the considerable legislative and judicial power which the Pope exercised in England, together with the power to make appointments to positions in the Church. It did so by asserting the sovereignty of the English Crown. It declared that England was an 'Empire' and that the English crown was an 'Imperial Crown'. It made the English ecclesiastical courts, in Canterbury and York, supreme in terms of canon law. This was revolutionary, though it was a revolution imposed from above.

In future all 'spiritual' cases, wherever they arose in the King's dominions would be determined 'within the King's jurisdiction and authority and not elsewhere.' The See of Rome should have no right to interfere, by way of 'inhibitions, appeals, sentences, citations, suspensions, interdictions, excommunications, restraints or judgments.' It was therefore foreseeable that the Pope would seek to subvert the new Act by placing England under an interdict (as he had in the time of King John); but the Act pre-empted this by providing that any priest who refused to perform the sacraments should be liable to a year's imprisonment and a fine. Further, anyone who attempted to invoke the jurisdiction of the Pope should be liable to severe penalties. Finally the Act dealt with 'spiritual' cases which were already 'in the pipeline' by clarifying that the appeal route for those should lie to the Archbishops of Canterbury or York, as the case might be.

The resemblance to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2017 is striking; but in historical terms it is important to note that this initial break with Rome (and much that followed) was brought about, not by royal decree, but by Act of Parliament. Many years later the Parliament in question was called 'the Reformation Parliament' (1529-1534); but Henry VIII was never a Protestant. He never changed his faith and simply wanted to have done with Rome; but it was a hard exit all the same.

Henry VIII was able to impose his will in England and Wales, and even in Ireland, though not in independent Scotland. It is in this light that we must look at Henrician legislation in Wales and Ireland. Henry was trying to bring about uniformity, but not parity. It was always clear that the English were to be the masters. In Wales Henry enacted a series of measures between 1535 and 1545 which have become known as either the Laws in Wales Acts, or the Acts of Union. The mischief Henry aimed at was clearly stated:

> Some rude and ignorant People have made Distinction and Diversity between the King's Subjects of this Realm, and his Subjects of the said Dominion and Principality of Wales, whereby great Discord, Variance, Debate, Division, Murmur and Sedition hath grown between his said Subjects;

And the King's purpose was equally clear:

> That his said Country or Dominion of Wales shall be, stand and continue for ever from henceforth incorporated, united and annexed to and with this his Realm of England.

The effect was to extend English law and administration into the whole of Wales, thereby creating a unitary state, with Welsh MPs sitting in Westminster and a common jurisdiction. In the past this was seen, even by a sizeable number of Welsh people, as progress; but this is not how the Welsh nationalist Gwynfor Evans saw it in 1974. He looked back on the period between Glendower's rebellion and the Acts of Union as a golden age:

> The hundred years before the Act of Union was the greatest century for Welsh poetry: the result of the national awakening and the heroic attempt to win national liberty. There were more poets of quality than ever before, and in this number were some truly great artists…and for them poetry was a craft, a craft ruled strictly by the professional Order of Bards. But they were more than bardic craftsmen; they were public leaders; and, just as important, they contributed to education.

And here is Evans on Henry VIII:

> It was the Act of Union that annexed Wales to England. It must be noted that it was in England, not Britain, that Wales was incorporated, and it was the English language, not a British tongue, which was to replace the Welsh speech. That language of kings and scholars, poets and lawyers was to be demoted to the position of a *patois* without status. From then until the twentieth century, London's policy was to destroy the language and delete the national tradition. The way to annihilate a nation is to obliterate its culture. The way to delete its culture is to destroy its language. This was the policy now followed.

Edward VI

It was under Edward VI that the Reformation became radically Protestant. Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries was followed by the abolition of the chantries and chantry chapels and by the transformation of the parish churches. Edward's reign also saw English insularity and xenophobia reach new heights. The Italian Andreas Franciscus told a friend how the Londoners hated all immigrants, and would attack anyone from Bruges on sight. In the *Italian Relation* of 1500 another reporter explained that:

> The English are great lovers of themselves and of everything belonging to them. They think there are no other men than themselves and no other world but England; and whenever they see a handsome foreigner, they say 'he looks like an Englishman', and 'It is a pity that he could not be an Englishman.'

Perhaps the best demonstration of Francophobia comes from John Coke's 'Debate between the Heralds of England and France', a fictional account of an encounter between English and French heralds. This was written in 1549, at a time when traditional prejudice had been overlaid with a Protestant contempt for the Roman Catholic Church.

The heralds spend most of their time trading insults – far worse than any used during the Brexit negotiations currently in progress – and they could certainly compete with any present day journalist for 'fake news'. Most of what they declaim as truth is pure fiction. For example, the French herald accuses the English as having supplied the only female Pope ever to sit on the throne of St Peter:

> Pope Agnes, a woman which toke upon her to syt in the moste holy Syege, dysceyvyng our mother the godly Churche of Rome, was of the nacion of Englande, to the great reproche of the sayd nacion.

In fact there is no evidence for there ever having been a female Pope during the Middle Ages (or since). Nor is this something which is ever likely to have been true.

There is much debate about how old England and France are – and the English herald declares that England is the older country

> Syr heralde, fyrste where you say how Fraunce was christened 107 yeres before Englande, I say, lady Prudence, howe the frenche heralde offendeth greatlye, in that he declareth not the truth accordyng to his offyce. For Arvyragus, kyng of England, was christened and all his realme by Josephe of Baromathy, the thre score and syxe yere after the deth of Christ, beyng long before any Hungarien, nowe Frenchemen, reygned in Fraunce.

Note the extraordinary idea that somehow, the French are not really French, but Hungarian refugees. The English herald goes out of his way to repeat this accusation several times. To call someone a 'Hungarian' was much the same as calling the Germans 'the Hun' in modern times:

> Lady Prudence, the true begining of the Frenchmen was by a vacabunde capytayne named Marcomyrus borne in Sicambria, a shyre or countie in Hungary, who assembled a nombre of idle and desperate people, beyng then myserable captives to the Romaynes; and rebelled agaynste Rome, wherupon the sayd Hungariens came by smale journeys into Almayne [Germany] nere Coleyn [Cologne], After, they trayterously dystroyed the pore people dwellyng in those countreis which they call now Fraunce, then called Galle, then called themselves Galles; yet after not contented, they called and wrote them selves Frenchemen.

The English herald next tells us that the English have the better of the French when it comes to heroes, starting with Brutus 'the right heir of Troy', and continuing with Arthur:

> Arthur, kyng of Englande, conquered Irlande, Goteland, Denmarke, Fryselande, Norway, Iselande, Grenelande, Orkeney, Lecto, Fraunce, Almayne, Naverne, Espayne, Portyngale, Aragon, Provence, Savoy, Burgoyne, Flaunders, Brabant, Henalde, Holande, Zelande, Geldres, and all Italy. This mygthy conquerour, for this valiaunces most glorious and marcial actes, is the fyrst and chyefe of the Nyne Worthies. He reygned 26 yeres: and dyed the yere of Our Lorde Gode 542, and was buryed in Glastenbury.

There is a debate about who has won most battles:

> Item, to that you say, Charlemayne, kyng of Fraunce, a Frencheman, wan

> many battayles agaynst the Almaynes, and Lombardes, and subduyng al Espayne brought them to the catholyque fayth, and after was Emperour and kyng of England, I say, lady Prudence, …this Charlemayne was a Dowcheman.

So, according to the English herald, Charlemagne was German; and by the way, William the Conqueror was not really Frenchm, but Danish; but then we come to the question of how big and important each country is. We might have thought that the English herald would be prepared to concede that France was geographically larger than England; but no, he stoutly maintained the opposite:

> Item,where you bost yourselfe howe Gallia nowe called Fraunce is bygger and of more puissaunce then Englande, I woll prove that not true by your owne cronycles… Fraunce, beyng a lytell countre in comparason to England.

However, in any case, every self-respecting Englishman knows that one Englishman is worth several French:

> And as for your puyssaunce and strength, I thynkeit not so great as you make it, for wve knowe your commons be vylaynes paysynes, not able to abyde the countenaunce of an Englysheman. Also you have enacted by parlyament, to cloke your cowardnes, that no french kyng shall shewe his face, or be personally in battayle agaynst Englyshemen.

Which country was the richer? Again, the English herald was quite prepared to argue that black was white, or rather than England was richer in every way than France; but now we also see a significant new element in English nationalism, in the form of a Protestant distaste for Roman Catholicism:

> Sir heralde (God be praysed) we have ryches above, under, and alongest the earth as you have. And as to ryches above th'erth, that is to say of people of al sortes, and first to the clergy. You have in Fraunce many bysshops, of whom fewe learned, only in the tradicions of man and lawes of Anticrist,teching and maynteynyng ipocrasy, supersticion and idolatry; theyr lyfe is huntyng, hawkyng, and kepyng of harlotes; And as for your abbays and religious howses, as you cal them, it is truth, all Fraunce is full of them, as nonnes, friers, monkes, chanons, armytes, ancres, rodianes, and other disguised harlottes, with fayre churches to dyvers of them,where all vyce and abhominacion is used; and thanked be God, in Englande we have none suche.

This playing of the Protestant card is entirely new. The young Henry VIII had been commended by the Pope for being the Defender of the Faith; but now, Protestantism had become an additional reason for despising and hating the

foreigner.

'Bloody Mary'

Queen Mary Tudor reigned between 1553 and 1558, before dying at the age of 42. She was a devout Roman Catholic, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon of Spain, and as Queen Regnant she married Philip II of Spain. She managed to restore English relations with the Papacy. In the brief time available, she was not able to restore the hundreds of monasteries and chantries which her father and brother had dissolved, but she did make some progress in re-establlishing Catholic forms of worship in the parish churches of England. As a result of the subsequent popularity of John Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs', she became notorious in English history as 'Bloody Mary'.

H.E.Marshall told the tale, so familiar to people of my generation, though she did not like to use the word 'bloody' in view of the tender age of her intended readership:

> Now began the most terrible time of Mary's reign, for it required more than a few words from King, Queen, and Pope to make England again truly Roman Catholic. The Protestants would not give up their religion. Mary was determined that they should. Those who refused were imprisoned and put to death in the most cruel way. They were burned alive. It would make you too sad to tell stories of this terrible time. In three years nearly three hundred people were put to death by Mary's cruel orders. So when you hear such names as Rogers, Hooper, Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer, honour them as heroes, and think gratefully of the many, many others, whose names we shall never know, but who suffered as bravely. (*Our Island Story*)

It is difficult to imagine how one could tell this story otherwise; but at the same time as I was imbibing it, Roman Catholic schoolchidren were being given a quite different point of view. Here is Father Lingard's explanation:

> If anything could be urged in extenuation of these cruelties, it must have been the provocation given by the reformers. The succession of a catholic sovereign deprived them of office and power had suppressed the English service, the idol of their affections; and had re-established the ancient worship, which they deemed antichristian and idolatrous, Disappointment embittered their zeal; and enthusiasm sanctified their intemperance. They heaped on the queen, her bishops, and her religion, every indecent and irritating epithet which language could supply…

In other words, the Protestant martyrs had only themselves to blame; but it is only fair to quote Lingard's judgment on Queen Mary's reign as a whole

> The worst blot on the character of this queen is her long and cruel persecution of the Protestants. The sufferings of the victims naturally begat an antipathy to the woman by whose authority they were inflicted. It is, however, but fair to recollect that it was her misfortune, rather than her fault, that she was not more enlightened than the wisest of her contemporaries.

Elizabeth I & the Sceptred Isle

Elizabeth I has rarely been criticised by historians, though Plantagenet Somerset Fry's *Cankered Rose* (1959) was an exception to the rule. She is the star of many films and TV costume dramas and is the only female dignitaryl represented in the Temple of British Worthies at Stowe (see below). She is chiefly famous because of the speech which she gave at Tilbury in 1588 when England faced invasion by Spanish troops gathered in the Netherlands:

> My loving people
>
> I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that [the Duke of] Parma or [the King of Spain], or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field.

Was this more than whistling in the dark? It is generally accepted that, if the Duke of Parma had been able to land his army on the South coast of England, the English land forces would not have stood a chance, any more than they would in 1940; but Parma was not able to join up with the Armada, and Spain's finest ships were either destroyed or wrecked. Yet the English were unwilling to accept that luck played a large part in 1588. They put their defeat of the 'Invincible' Spanish Armada down to superior English seamanship and the courage shown by our Sovereign. Queen Elizabeth's Day continued to be celebrated throughout the towns and villages of England, and it remained a popular festival until it was supersededby Guy Fawkes's Day in the 17th century.

The events of 1588 show that Spain had for the time being replaced France as England's 'hereditary enemy'. How had this come about? It was largely the product of religious differences, since Spanish troops formed the vanguard of the Counter-Reformation. Spain posed a threat to Protestant England because, in the time of Philip II, she was a superpower.

In the late 16th century, the Spanish Empire occupied most of South and Central America; and Spanish cruelty towards indigenous populations had been amply publicised by the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas in his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*); but she also occupied or controlled large parts of Italy, and of what we now know as France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The atrocities committed by Spanish troops during the Dutch War of Independence (1568-1648) especially during the 1560s and 70s received wide publicity in England, and John Foxe (1516–1587) devoted a whole chapter of his *Acts and Monuments*, popularly known as the 'Book of Martyrs', to *The execrable Inquisition of Spayne*. The result was that, rightly or wrongly, the Spaniards became the subject of a powerful 'black legend'. The English had much to fear from both in 1588 and later, when they stood alone against King Philip of Spain.

Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* was one of a trio of works which helped to make England a truly Protestant nation by the end of Elizabeth's reign, the others being Tyndale's English *Bible* and Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*. All three were written in English, and all three argued, expressly or by implication, that the Papacy was a malevolent influence, and that for 1,000 years the Church had had been heading in the wrong direction: the true Church was to be found in the congregations of a few faithful souls in England. This new view of history was reinforced by the work of William Camden, who did much to discredit the myths surrounding Brutus and King Arthur and his Round Table.

> The authenticity of Geoffrey's account of the Britons' Trojan origin was under attack. The classical, Celtic, chivalric, historical mythology of the later Middle Ages, promoted by Geoffrey and [focusing on] the figure of King Arthur, was increasingly supplanted by another, derived not from Virgil but from Tacitus. 'The Saxons were to replace the Britons, just as King Alfred replaced King Arthur as a model king. (Burrow, *Liberal Descent*).

The high priest of English nationalism in the Tudor period must surely be William Shakespeare, though he famously did not 'do God.' It is he who coined the phrase 'This Sceptred Isle' when he put it in the mouth of John of Gaunt in his play *Richard II* (first performed in 1595):

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,

But there is another point of view, even of Good Queen Bess. Queen Elizabeth has an equally black name in Father Lingard's book, for her persecution of Roman Catholics. To some extent, he blamed Elizabeth's advisers; but he pulled no punches when it came to the 1590s, when all Catholic 'recusants' came under suspicion of treachery as well as heresy and received 'rough justice' as a result, or even no justice at all:

> From the defeat of the Armada to the death of the queen, during the lapse of fourteen years, the Catholics groaned under the pressure of incessant persecution. Sixty-one clergymen, forty-seven laymen, and two gentlewomen suffered capital punishment for some or other of the spiritual felonies and treasons which had been lately created. Generally the court dispensed with the examination of witnesses: by artful and ensnaring questions an avowal was drawn from prisoner, that had been reconciled, or had harboured a priest, or had been ordained beyond the sea, or that he admitted the ecclesiastical supremacy of the pope, or rejected that of the Queen. Anyone of these crimes was sufficient to consign him to the scaffold.

Ireland

The sceptred isle seldom appears to be a demi-paradise when viewed from across the Irish Sea; and this is especially so in the Tudor period. The Reformation was a top-down affair in England; but Protestantism eventually became the religion of the great majority. Not so in Ireland, where it was imposed and never took root. Writing in 1918, P.S. O'Hegarty condemned Henry VIII in round terms:

> The Anglican Church in Ireland was essentially a political move, a part of Henry's scheme for building up an English civilization. In Ireland, an English interest which could be trusted to remain English and resist assimilation successfully. The Reformation in England was largely political prejudice, the so-called Reformation in Ireland was wholly political prejudice. There was no religion in it.

In order to bring about an 'ever increasing union' between England (and now Wales) on the one hand, and Ireland on the other, Henry caused the Irish Parliament in Dublin to enact the Crown of Ireland Act 1542, which abolishd the old Lordship of Ireland and replaced it with a Kingdom of Ireland. This established a personal union between the English and Irish crowns, similar to that which was to be established between England and Scotland in 1603.

Listen to O'Hegarty on this. Referring to the argument that the Crown of Ireland was endorsed by some of the Gaelic chiefs, as well as the leaders of the Anglo-Irish community in the Pale, he fulminated:

> Even assuming the accuracy of the indentures which are said to have been signed by the Irish chiefs about this time, accepting Henry as their feudal king and promising to do him feudal obedience, even then the whole process is as empty as ever. For the Irish chiefs had no power in such a matter to speak for the Irish nation, the chief's voice was only one.voice, he was not the owner of his clan, or of its territory, or of its rights, but the elected chief of the clan and the elected guardian of its territory and rights. Henry's acceptance as King of Ireland was an acceptance only by the Pale civilization, by the English strength in the country.

The vast majority of the population in Ireland remained Catholic; but the Crown now inaugurated a policy of 'planting' Protestant English in various parts of the island. As O'Hegarty describes it:

> The three "Plantations" which are especially noted in history books, the Plantation of Leix and Offaly by Mary, of Munster by Elizabeth, and of Ulster by James, merely denoted an extension of that principle from the garrison stage to the extermination stage, not the stage of extermination by battle, but the stage ofextermination by slaughter and burning women and children, cattle and crops.

Note that one of the Plantations mentioned here – the Plantation of Leix and Offaly was made, not by a Protestant monarch, but by Queen Mary Tudor – the staunch champion of Roman Catholicism. So it cannot have been carried out for purely religious reasons.

The end of Elizabeth's reign was marked by 'Tyrone's Rebellion', or Nine Years' War, in Ireland (1593 and 1603). This was a bitter affair, which marked the culmination of a century in which the English had moved out of the medieval Pale and into the whole of Ireland, though the fighting mostly took place in the North. The War, which mainly involved the Gaelic chiefs of Ulster, O'Neill and O'Donnell, and the forces of the Crown, obliged the English to commit major forces, commanded inter alia by the Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam, the Earl of Essex and Lord Mountjoy.

The Nine Years' War ended in defeat for the Irish lords, which led to their exile (the 'Flight of the Earls' in 1607, and the Plantation of Ulster from 1609. This war was the largest conflict fought by England in the Elizabethan era. At its height (1600–1601) it saw more than 18,000 soldiers fighting in the English army in Ireland, whereas the number assisting the Dutch in their War of Independence never exceeded 12,000. Irish sources claim that 60,000 died in the Ulster famine of 1602-3;

and a total Irish death toll of over 100,000 is possible, while some 30,000 English soldiers may also have perished, mainly from disease.

As James Shaprio explains in his book *1599* (published in 2005) it was the Nine Years' War which formed the immediate background to Shakespeare's *Henry V*. So, from an English point of view, there was more than one reason for its success and subsequent fame. The theme of a victory for English heroism, with the help of God, was especially poignant. But from an Irish point of view, the War was merely part of a policy of genocide. O'Hegarty states this clearly, whilst also being sceptical about the peace treaty which the English imposed on his countrymen in 1603:

> There has been much nonsense written about this particular point in Irish history, and historians with flimsy knowledge of the period have written rounded periods on the fair prospect which was opening up for Ireland in the justice which she was about to receive from England on the one hand, and the determination of the erstwhile rebels to be loyal, on the other. But the English were only resting on their oars, pending the next move in the game, as were the Irish. Both parties had put out all their strength in a big fight, which left them exhausted, and the [peace] treaty was, like all similar treaties.a compromise. The mainspring of English policy in Ireland - the subjection of the Irish race, and the imposition upon it of a ruling and holding garrison, was still there.

When reading O'Hegarty, we often get the impression that we are reading propaganda; but on the other hand, the average Elizabethan Englishman took the same prejudiced and baleful view of the 'wild Irish' as Gerald of Wales had taken 400 years previously:

> The Lord Deputy's secretary, Fynes Moryson wroteabout the Irish [when] the forces of Queen Elizabeth were closing in on them: "The wild Irish, inhabiting many and large provinces, are barbarous and most filthy in their diet. They scum the seething pot with an handful of straw, and strain their milk taken from the cow through a like handful of straw, none of the cleanest, and so cleanse, or rather more defile the pot and milk. They devour great morsels of meat unsalted, and they eat commonly swine's flesh, seldom mutton, and all these pieces of flesh ... they seethe in a hollow tree, lapped in a raw cow's hide, and so set over the fire, and therewith" (Jonathan Bardon)

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

> The dispensations of the Lord have been as if he had said, England, thou art my first-born, my delight amongst the nations, under the whole heavens the Lord hath not dealt so with any of the people round about us.
>
> Oliver Cromwell, 23 May 1654

In stark contrast to the Tudor monarchs, the Stuart dyasty has not had a good press in England. They were all, of course, of Scottish descent; and James VI & I, the first of them, made a poor first impression. Far too fond of his theories and his Scottish favourites, he aroused the distrust of English Puritans and parliamentarians from the beginning. His son Charles I, whatever his merits, lacked judgement. Even his greatest advocate (Edward Hyde M.P., later Earl of Clarendon) was criticial of him:

> He had an excellent understanding, but was not confident enough of it; which made him oftentimes change his own opinion for a worse, and follow the advice of men that did not judge so well as himself. He was always an immoderate lover of the Scottish nation, having not only been born there, but educated by that people, and besieged by them always, having few English about him till he was king; and the major number of his servants being still of that nation, who he thought could never fail him.

Charles II was initially popular, but idle, and content to live as a French pensioner when unable to agree with Parliament, though we still think of him as 'the Merry Monarch'. James II, not content to be a closet Catholic, 'came out' as such, and as a result lost his throne to William of Orange. William was a 'good king', at least in Protestant eyes, but was never regarded with any great affection in Englad (contrast the position in Unionist Northern Ireland).

Such at least are the popular stereotypes. Oliver Cromwell played in a different league altogether. He has long been hated in Ireland while, even in

England, Father Lingard took the view that he was fundamentally a power-seekng hypocrite:

> Till Buonaparte arose, the name of Cromwell stood without a parallel in the history of civilised Europe. Men looked with a feeling of awe on the fortunate individual who, without the aid of birth, or wealth, or connections, was able to impose the yoke of servitude on the necks of the very men who had fought in his company to emancipate themselves from the less arbitrary sway of their hereditary sovereign. He seems to have looked upon dissimulation as the perfection of human wisdom, and to have made it the key-stone of the arch on which he built his fortunes.

In the late 20th century the Marxist historian and Master of Balliol, Christopher Hill, wrote about Cromwell as an English country gentleman who presided over a revolution in the 1640s, only to become a reactionary as Lord Protector. Hill also cites an extraordinary remark made by Joseph Stalin in Moscow in 1934. H.G.Wells had gone to see Stalin, and they fell into conversation about Cromwell. Stalin remarked that Cromwell had overthrown the existing social order by force. Wells replied that Cromwell had acted in accordance with the constitution; but Stalin would not let him get away with this. He replied

> In the name of the constitution, [Cromwell] took up arms, executed the king, dissolved the Parliament, imprisoned some and beheaded others. (Hill, 1970)

In view of the range of these views, it is surprising that Cromwell is commemorated by means of a prominent statue outside the Houses of Parliament; but that is because, in the past, he has been revered as one of the founding fathers of parliamentary democracy.

The Puritan Revolution

There was undoubtedly a political revolution in England in the mid 17th century – how else should we describe a set of circumstances in which there was a civil war, followed by the execution of the King, the abolition of the House of Lords, and the disestablishment of the Church of England? However, the driving force behind these events was not the rise of a new class, but religious differences within the ruling class. S.R.Gardiner (1829-1902) realised this over a century ago, when he devoted 19 volumes to the history of the *Puritan Revolution*; and Michael Walzer reminded us of it in 1965, in his *Revolution of the Saints*; but for much of the 20th century, the religious explanation was not thought to be enough. Great events must have deep causes, and (specifically) material causes, or so at least it was thought, by Marxists and others.

Of course, those who thought that religious belief must be intimately connected with the economics or ethos of the society in which it was rooted – Marx, Weber, Tawney and Hill among them - were not unaware of the religious persuasion of the men who made the revolution; but they played the religion down, and played up their own areas of interest. So, when Hill gave the Ford Lectures for 1961-2 and later published them as *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1965) he deliberately left the Bible well alone. Yet we cannot understand events in England between 1640 and 1660 without regard to the overwhelming importance to contemporaries of the Puritan version of Christianity. But, there were four kinds of Puritan: those within the body of the established Church who wanted to reform it from within; those who wanted to reform the organisation itself, by setting up a Presbyterian system on Scottish lines; the 'Independents', who wanted self-government for each parish; and the sects, who wanted to separate from the Church of England altogether. Oliver Cromwell can best be classified as an Independent.

More like a Christian fundamentalist than a modern nonconformist, Cromwell was born in 1599. His parents had lived through a time when the English lived in fear of a Spanish invasion. He was five years old when King James VI & I made peace with Spain; and six at the time of the Gunpowder Plot. He grew to manhood at a time when Puritans thought that King James was far too friendly with the Spanish Ambassador. Cromwell once said:

> The papists in England have been accounted, ever since I was born, Spaniolised… Spain was their patron.

Cromwell was in his early twenties when King James's daughter and son-in-law, the Protestant monarchs of Bohemia and the Palatinate, were expelled from their domains by Catholic forces. He was 26 when Charles I married a French Catholic Princess, Henrietta Maria. He was an M.P. before and after the 'Eleven Years Tyranny' of 1629-40, when Charles attempted to rule without Parliament and tried to impose 'Arminian' forms of worship and discipline on the Church, both in England and in Scotland. Many Puritans thought this kind of religion was little better than Popery.

Cromwell rose to prominence as a result of his military expertise, rather than his performance in Parliament. He was appointed Lieutenant-General of cavalry and second-in-command of the New Model Army in 1645, with Fairfax as overall commander. At Naseby later that year, his cavalry routed the King's, and Cromwell (and Fairfax) took the formal surrender of the Royalists at Oxford in June 1646. His military success continued through all the difficult years which followed. He believed in 'providences' – in other words that God still intervened in the world rom day to day, and showed His favour by rewarding his chosen people. The English were God's chosen people, and Cromwell believed that he was their chosen instrument. He even had a 'fortunate day', September 3rd, the day on which he won

the Battles of Dunbar in 1650 and of Worcester in 1651 (thoughit was also the day he died, in 1658).

The historians John Morrill and Blair Worden have commented that Cromwell's writing and speeches were 'suffused with biblical references' from at least 1648. After the battle of Preston in 1648, the study of Psalms 17 and 105 had made him determined to punish Charles I, 'that man of blood, for the blood that he hath shed'; and he was not at all reluctant to sign the King's death warrant in 1649, unlike Fairfax, who refused to sign at all.

As a result of the disagreement between Cromwell and Fairfax, Cromwell took charge of the Army - now the only rival to what was left of the Long Parliament – and in April 1653 he dissolved this 'Rump' and summoned a nominated Parliament, known to history as 'Barebones' Parliament. This assembly was more like a Convention, in that it was supposed to come up with a plan for a permanent constitutional and religious settlement, rather than be a permanent fixture; and Cromwell told the new assembly:

> Truly God hath called you to this work by, I think, as wonderful providences as ever passed upon the sons of men in so short a time

However, no such plan emerged; and, when it appeared that many M.P.s were dangerous radicals, with beliefs similar to those held by the millenarian Fifth Monarchy Men, Barebone's Parliament voted to dissolve itself.

Cromwell stepped forward to fill the void. He was at heart a conservative country gentlemen, favouring a constitution with some element of 'monarchical power in it'; and he was no social revolutionary, saying that 'a nobleman, a gentleman, a yeoman, that is a good interest of the land and a great one.' The Instrument of Government made him Lord Protector for life, with most of the powers of a King, but without the title. A Council of State became the Protector's 'privy council', with powers to issue ordinances that were legally binding, pending ratification by Parliament.

Oliver's Protectorate lasted from 1654 until his death in 1658. It was effective enough in various fields; but it failed to attract enough support amongst the people whose opinion mattered. It was disliked by Royalists, Presbyterians and Anglicans, who regarded it as illegitimate and too radical. On the other hand, it did not go far enough for those who really wanted to change society.

Under the terms of the Instrument of Government, Cromwell summoned two Parliaments; but the M.P.s who sat in them were more interested in changing the constitution again than in the day to day business of government; and so Oliver dissolved them both. In between these two parliaments (and as a result of a Royalist uprising in March 1655) he experimented with direct military rule. England was divided into districts ruled by fifteen Major Generals, answerable only to him. These men played a critical role in relation to national security and Cromwell's crusade to reform the nation's morals. They supervised local militias, collected taxes and

encouraged support for central government. Commissioners for securing the peace of the commonwealth were appointed to work with them, most being zealous puritans who embraced the work with enthusiasm; but the Major-Generals lasted less than a year.

Short-lived though it was, the English have a folk memory of the rule of the Major-Generals, which is encapsulated in a painting by W. F. Yeames R.A. (1835–1918). *'And When Did You Last See Your Father?'* hangs in Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery and shows a Royalist house under occupation by Parliamentarians. A young boy in a blue suit is being interrogated as to the whereabouts of the master of the house, by a group of stern Puritans. The message is clear: this was a time when the Englishman's home was no longer his castle and when personal liberty was extinguished by military dictatorship and an overweening state.

In the light of the above, one might wonder how Cromwell ever acquired a reputation as a champion of Parliament. The Victorians who paid for his statue to be erected outside the Houses of Parliament must have thought so; and they could point to the fact that Cromwell had been a colleague of Pym and Hampden in the early 1640s, when the 'Good Old Cause' enjoyed its golden age; that he had good constitutional reasons for dissolving the Rump; and that the source of his power as Protector was 'the Triennial Parliament' referred to in the Instrument of Government of 1653. On the other hand, the summoning of Barebones's Parliament and the rule of the Major Generals suggest that Oliver saw Parliament as a means to an end, which was some unspecified kind of 'Godly rule.'

One might also ask how Cromwell acquired his reputation as a libertarian, since he used force to suppress the Levellers and re-imposed censorship, once he had become Protector. The answer is partly that he was thought to have defeated Charles I's plan to establish an absolute monarchy, and partly because of his tolerant attitude in matters of religion, at least towards Protestants. After all, the Intrument of Government broke the monopoly of the Church of England for the first time, by declaring that 'none shall be compelled by penalties or otherwise to accept public profession of the national Church', and clause 37 guaranteed liberty of conscience for all Christians, except Catholics and those who believed in 'Prelacy' (i.e. adherents of Charles I and Archbishop Laud's High Anglicanism).

The Bourgeois Revolution

The Earl of Clarendon wrote about the prolonged period of turmoil and civil war between 1640 and 1660 as 'the Great Rebellion'. In recent years the phrase 'The War of Three Kingdoms' has been fashionable; but in the 1960s, the period was almost always referred to as 'the English Revolution'. This was largely due to the popularity of Christopher Hill's lectures and books, in particular *The English Revolution of 1640*, first published in 1940 (at a time when Hill said that he did not expect to live very long).

For many years Hill was a member of the Communist Party, and he remained a life-long Marxist. He was also Master of Balliol College, Oxford between 1965 and 1978 and became one of the most influential historians of his day. His whole purpose was to establish the links between what he saw as underlying economic and social causes and intellectual and political developments. He admitted that he might not have adequately established or explained the precise links; but he had no doubt that they existed – the iron laws of dialectical materialism meant that it must be so.

In 1940, Hill proposed not only that there had been an English Revolution three centuries previously; but also that this was a classic 'bourgeois' revolution. He developed the idea by studying a huge number of pamphlets stored in the Bodleian Library, which had been published after the removal of censorship in 1641; and his knowledge of this literature was unparalleled; but he seldom consulted other sources. Hill had his critics: A.L.Rowse wondered if we were any wiser for knowing what a few revolutionary extremists had thought; J.H.Hexter questioned Hill's methodology; B.H.G.Wormald stoutly maintained that Clarendon was right to say that there had never been a revolution, only a Great Rebellion; and Peter Laslett pointed out, from a sociological point of view, that there could not possibly have been a class war in the 1640s, because there was only one class which mattered. However, at the time the critics seemed like voices crying in the wilderness. Hill gave the Ford Lectures in Oxford in 1961-2, his *Century of Revolution* was a textbook for schools when I studied 'A' level English history in 1963-5 and his views seemed to become the dominant ideology in the years that followed. But note, his books were almost exclusively about English history, not British.

Hill modified his views somewhat over time, even conceding that the revolution had not been of the classic Marxist variety. Thus, in *God's Englishman, Oliver Cromwell and the English Revoliution* (1970), he admitted that there was no revolutionary ideology at work between 1640 and 1660, and that no social revolution had taken place. He had never argued that the Revolution was the work of a vanguard party, similar to the Bolsheviks; and by 1970 he even conceded that it ws over by 1653. Nevertheless, he still thought that the Interregnum of 1649-60 was a period of profound change:

> The British Empire, the slave trade, the plunder of India, the exploitation of Ireland; Parliamentary government, the Union of England and Scotland; religious toleration, relative freedom of the press, an attitude favourable to science; a country of capitalist farmers and agricultural labourers, the only country in Europe without a peasantry: none of these would have come about in quite same way without the English Revolution, nor without Oliver Cromwell. (Hill, 1970)

In addition, in *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1967 and 1997) and *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) Hill re-invented the revolution, emphasizing

that there had been lower-class people in England in the 1640s and 50s who expressed some very radical ideas indeed; that the world had indeed, for a time, been turned upside down; and that once the radical genie had been let out of the bottle, it was impossible to put him back. Even the Restoration had not restored the old ways entirely.

> If we turn to the present day, the change is obvious. After two centuries of industrial civilization most men and women accept the existence of scientific laws, even when they do not understand them. They expect uniformities: the surviving superstitions and magical practices are only semi-serious. (Hill, 1970).

History and historiography have moved on since the 1960s. Hill was supremely uninterested in the writings of conservatives and reactionaries, of whom there many, starting with Clarendon, Hobbes and Filmer; but many studies have now shown what one might well have suspected all along – that the broad mass of Englishmen and women, of every class and in all areas, were conservative with a small 'c' in 1640 and remained so in 1660.

In *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (1985) David Underdown studied a wide range of literature and archives, and in particular court records of various types in the three Western counties of Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire; and everywhere he found conservatism and a deep attachment to the Christian faith, the parish and the old ways. This was not just true of 'Anglicans' and 'Royalists': it was true of 'Puritans' and 'Parliamentarians' too. The desire to turn the world upside down was confined to very few people indeed. The innate conservatism of English people explains the revival of Royalism in 1646-8, culminating in the Second Civil War. (See, for example, Robert Ashton's *Counter Revolution, The Second Civil War and Its Origins, 1646-8* (1994). This popular royalism led to widespread dissatisfaction with both the Rump Parliament and the New Model Army. Cromwell's ascendancy during the 1650s was based on raw military power and he never succeeded in basing his regime on any widespread political, let alone Parliamentary, consensus. The Restoration became almost inevitable, and was widely and genuinely popular when it took place. These conclusions were amply confirmed by Robert Ashton's wider study *The Counter-Revolution* (1994). In addition, many writers have re-emphasised the importance of religion in the 17th century – see for example Underdown's *Fire From Heaven, Life in an English town in the Seventeenth Century* (1992).

` The most devastating critique of Hill's work, perhaps, was Alastair Maclachlan's *Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England - Essay on the Fabrication of Seventeenth Century History* (1996). Other writers have sought to establish the importance of the links between events in England, Scotland and Ireland – especially Conrad Russell in *The Fall of the British Monarchies* (1991). In conclusion it seems, not only was that there was no English Revolution in 1640, but that there was very little desire for one. Moreover, the really radical groups - the Quakers, Muggletonians,

Diggers, and Fifth-Monarchy Men – were few and far between, though their opponents tended to exaggerate the various dangers they posed.

Cromwell's British Commonwealth

After King Charles I was executed in 1649, a republic was declared, known as the 'Commonwealth of England'; and this soon became 'the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland'. Oliver Cromwell was instrumental in bringing this Union about, but he did it by military force. As Miss Marshall explained:

> The people of Scotland and Ireland, however, were very angry when they heard what had happened. The Scots had never wished the King to be killed; they had hoped to force him to rule better. At the same time the Irish rebelled, and Cromwell and his Ironsides went to subdue them. Very many of the Irish were Roman Catholics, and some years before they had risen and cruelly murdered the Irish Protestants. Cromwell hated the Roman Catholics, and he intended now to punish them for their cruelty to the Protestants,

She was not wrong about Cromwell. He did indeed blame the Irish Catholics for the persecution of Protestants in Ireland during the 1640s, and the Catholic Church for its persecution of them in Europe during the previous century. In a speech to the Army Council he declared that:

> I had rather be overthrown by a Cavalierish interest than a Scotch interest; I had rather be overthrown by a Scotch interest than an Irish interest, and I think of all this is the most dangerous.

After landing in Dublin, Cromwell stormed the ports of Drogheda and Wexford to secure his lines of supply. After the siege of Drogheda in September 1649, his troops killed nearly 3,500 people, comprising around 2,700 Royalist soldiers and all the men in the town carrying arms, but also (according to some reports) some civilians, prisoners and Roman Catholic priests. At the siege of Wexford the following month, another massacre took place, during which some of Cromwell's soldiers broke into the town, killing 2,000 Irish troops and up to 1,500 civilians.

All this was the subject of confusing reports; and in *Cromwell: An Honourable Enemy* (1999) Tom Reilly caused a storm in Ireland by disputing the conventional wisdom that Cromwell was guilty of inexcusable atrocities. He went back to original sources and showed that these were consistent with the view that Cromwell's forces were licensed to kill anyone in uniform or who bore arms, but that (in the main) they

spared innocent civilians. Reilly hoped that his book would transform traditional attitudes; but has admitted since that he failed:

> The reaction - among the under forties on the whole - was good; but among historians and the over forties it was bad. They can't seem to accept that an amateur could discover such a fundamental flaw in Irish history, i.e. that neither Cromwell nor his men ever engaged in the killing of unarmed civilians throughout his entire nine-month campaign. We MUST have our English hate figures - despite the truth. How sad is that?

Reilly is almost certainly right, that the massacres at Drogheda and Wexford have been exaggerated; but there is no denying the brutality of the English conquest of Ireland as a whole. This involved Stalinesque policies of expropriation, transplantation and transportation; and even Christopher Hill, though a great admirer of Cromwell in many ways, did not seek to excuse Oliver's attitude to the Irish, though he was by no means alone, amongst Englishmen:

> [Cromwell], the poet Spenser, the philosopher Bacon and the poet Milton, who believed passionately in liberty and human dignity, all shared the view that the Irish were culturally so inferior that their subordination was natural and necessary. Religious hostility reinforced cultural contempt; and the strategic considerations [fear of Spanish invasion] reinforced by the anxieties to which the second civil war had given rise [fear of royalist rebellion] added overtones of fear to the contempt and hatred. (Hill, 1970).

Hill added that there was yet a further ingredient to be added to the poisous broth of emotions which drove English policy in Ireland in the 1650s. This was:

> A conscientious enthusiasm for conferring the benefits of English civilisation on the natives, whether they liked it or not.

Cromwell sought to excuse the way his troops behaved as legitimate revenge: 'I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches'. Further, he had no intention of tolerating Roman Catholicism:

> For what you mention concerning liberty of conscience, you mean a liberty to exercise the Mass, I judge it best to use plain dealing, and to let you know, where the Parliament of England have power, that will not be allowed of.

Once Cromwell returned to England, the public practice of Catholicism was banned here, and Catholic priests were killed when captured. As for Ireland, he declared that the Catholics of Ireland there could go 'to Hell or Connacht'; and

under the Act of Settlement of 1652 only those who could prove 'constant good affection' to the parliamentary cause were allowed to keep their estates. In practice this meant that all Catholic landowners would lose their ancestral homes, in exchange for smaller grants of land in the province of Connacht (west of the River Shannon). A search of the countryside was then conducted to see whether the landowners had in fact moved, and those who had not were court-martialled and in some cases executed. The confiscated estates were then allocated to over 33,000 English soldiers, of whom around 12,000 stayed, while the rest sold what they had been granted to speculators.

These policies have been characterised as a kind of genocide, but it has to be said that the Cromwellian plantations did not always work, because many of Oliver's soldiers disobeyed the ban on marrying Irish girls; and in time, they or their offspring became Catholics. Forty years later a visiting Englishman commented on the survival of Irish culture:

> We cannot wonder at this, when we consider how many there are of the children of Oliver's soldiers in Ireland who cannot speak one word of English. (Bardon).

Yet even this dismal description paints too rosy a picture. Consider Father Lingard's comment on the fate of the Irish, after Cromwell and his army had finished with them:

> The wives and families of those who had perished by disease and the casualties of war, and of the multitudes who were reduced to a state of utter destitution, were conveyed to the West Indies, where they were sold as slaves. All Catholic priests were ordered to quit Ireland within twenty days, under the penalties of high treason, and all other persons were forbidden to harbour any such clergymen under the pain of death.

Several months after he left Ireland in May 1650, Cromwell invaded Scotland, after the Scots had proclaimed Charles I's eldest son as king; and he led the invasion with high hopes. He was much less hostile to Scottish Presbyterians, some of whom had been his allies in the First English Civil War, than he was to Irish Catholics. He described the Scots as a people 'fearing [God's] name, though deceived'. He made a famous appeal to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, urging them to see the error of their alliance with Prince Charles —'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.'

The Scots would not change their minds; and, on 3 September 1650, (his lucky day), Cromwell smashed the main Scottish army at the Battle of Dunbar, killing 4,000 Scottish soldiers, taking another 10,000 prisoner, and then capturing the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. The victory was of such a magnitude that Cromwell

called it "A high act of the Lord's Providence to us [and] one of the most signal mercies God hath done for England and His people".

The policy of the Long Parliament, and of the Protector, towards Scotland resembled in its aim their policy toward Ireland.

> In each case the object was to make the conquered country into an integral part of a British Empire. But the measures adopted to attain this object differed considerably. In Scotland there was no general confiscation of the lands of the vanquished, and no far-reaching alteration in the framework of society. The Scottish Royalists were treated much as the English Cavaliers had been. Hence the Scottish confiscations, although they ruined many of the nobility and gentry, left the bulk of the nation untouched. In Scotland there was no proscription of the national religion, but the national Church lost a portion of its independence, and was deprived of all power to check or control the civil government. (Firth)

The Scottish Parliament was abolished, and replaced with representation in a Parliament of Great Britain. Cromwell thereby achieved, in theory, what James VI & I had failed to achieve. In 1652, commissioners sent by the Long Parliament extorted a reluctant consent to the principle of the union from the Scots. By the Instrument of Government in 1654, Scotland was assigned thirty members in the British Parliament, and the Protector's ordinances completed the work. From the English point of view, the Cromwellian Union was intended 'to procure the happiness and prosperity of all that were under the government,' and was thought to have been "cheerfully accepted by the most judicious amongst the Scots, who well understood how great a concession it was in the Parliament of England to permit a people they had conquered to have a part in the legislative power." Cromwell told the Scots that his invasion of their country was

> A just and necessary defence of [England] for preservation of those rights and liberties which divine Providence hath, through the expense of so much blood and treasure, given us, and those amongst you have engaged they will, if they can, wrest from us. (Hill, 1970).

But many Scots and most modern historian did not, and do not, agree with the Protector's fond hopes:

> As for the embodying of Scotland with England, it will be as when the poor bird is embodied in the hawk that has eaten it up" said Robert Blair. With few exceptions all classes regarded the incorporating union with hostility and aversion. (Firth)

> Cromwell placed the pitch-black shadow of his hand across the face of Britain. The three kingdoms were brought together in a hellish union over which he presided with the title of Lord Protector. To his face men addressed him as 'your Highness', but behind his back many called him a tyrant and a usurper. He charged Scotland £10,000 a month for the privilege of being occupied by his English garrisons. (Neil Oliver)

Making England Great Again

Cromwell grew up when the legend of Good Queen Bess was being written, by her former courtiers and by Shakespeare, in his last play *Henry VIII*. The legend told how the Queen had defeated Catholic Spain with the help of her heroic sea-dogs, both in the Channel at the time of the Armada, and by harrying Spain on the high seas. By way of contrast, the first two Stuart monarchs cut sorry figures. James I gained a reputation for spending too much on his family and his courtiers, some of whom (especially when Scottish) were regarded in England as being little better than parasites. James also incurred unpopularity by making peace with Spain and becoming too close to the Spanish ambassador, Count Gondomar. Lastly, James stood aside during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), when Princess Elizabeth (his own daughter) was driven out of her husband's domains in Bohemia and the Palatinate, and the Hapsburgs led the charge in overrunning large parts of Protestant Germany. As for Charles I, he married a Catholic French Princess, who was allowed to have Catholics around her at court, including Catholic priests.

In the 1620s and 30s, England's reputation reached a new low internationally. English merchants had been driven out of the East and West Indies, and the monarchy had even been unable to protect our fishing, or prevent North African pirates from coastal-dwellers off to slavery. In 1640 the Venetian Ambassador commented 'England has become a nation useless to all the rest of the world, and consequently of no consideration.'

The new English Republic found that there was a new threat, in the form of the Dutch Republic, which had been recognized by Spain at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Whereas Catholic Spain had posed an existential threat to England in Elizabeth's time, the Protestant Dutch had now emerged as our main opponent, in economic and commercial terms. Indeed the Dutch had become the dominant power on the sea; and the English Republic went to war in 1652, to break what it regarded as a Dutch stranglehold on international trade.

The Republiclans were more efficient than the royalist governments of James and Charles I had been, and they were able to raise larger amounts by way of taxation. Consequently they were able to maintain a larger army and navy. It was chiefly this, and especially the newly enhanced power at sea, which transformed

England's prospects and reputation, between 1649 and 1658, when Cromwell died.

As Protector, Cromwell inherited the war with the Dutch; but his natural inclination was to make peace with them. In 1651, he had even proposed a Union between the Dutch and English Republics in 1651; and he now made fresh proposals. The Dutch offered a comprehensive free trade agreement - which was unacceptable to the English, since the Dutch were so much stronger commercially. Various rounds of talks saw the English put forward an offer of a military alliance against Spain, coupled with the repeal of the protectionist Navigation Act, in return for Dutch assistance in the conquest of Spanish America. This proposal was rejected. Cromwell then made a whole raft of new demands, including that all Royalists be expelled from the Netherlands and that the Dutch should abandon their ally Denmark in her war with Sweden; but in the end he gave in, and peace was made in April 1654, by the Treaty of Westminster.

Cromwell turned his attention towards Spain, which had been England's enemy in his early childhood and which now controlled much of the American trade, including the most lucrative part, which was with the West Indies. The so-called 'Western Design' was a plan to establish a bridgehead there by capturing Hispaniola. Though it resulted instead in the capture of Jamaica, this proved a turning point in the history of the British Empire. Hill was in no doubt about the significance of the outcome, which was to create something of an economic miracle, along with an enduring moral dilemma:

> For the next 150 years the West Indies were crucial to English imperial and foreign policy. Jamaica was the centre of the slave trade, first supplying slaves for other West Indian islands, then for the southern colonies on the mainland of America. The eighteenth-century prosperity of Bristol and Liverpool is unthinkable, without Jamaica and the slave trade. (Hill, 1970)

Notwithstanding its Puritanical dislike of actors and the stage, the Protectorate played a much more impressive role on the European stage than the Stuart monarchy had done. In 1633 'England had no minister of her own at any court of Europe' except Constantinople; but, under Cromwell, she established diplomatic relations with Russia, Sweden, Poland, and Brandenburg; Transylvania and Courland asked for Cromwell's assistance. His ambitions even stretched as far afield as the Morea, Morocco and India.

In the late 17th century the poet John Dryden wrote that Cromwell 'taught the English lion to roar'; and later Jonathan Swift wrote that Cromwell 'terrified all Europe, as well as three nations, by the grandeur of his courage and the spirit of his army'. Hill thought that the English were already 'patriotic, not to say jingoistic' in Tudor times; but that it was during the 'revolutionary decades' that a consciousness of nationality embraced the whole English nation:

> More people were drawn into political action and brought under the more direct dominance of London. National consciousness was extended to new geographical areas and lower social levels. The transition from divine right of monarchy to the divine right of the nation had lasting consequences. The new English patriotism was closely associated with religion, with liberty and with the rise of the middle class. (Hill, 1970).

CHAPTER NINE

THE TEMPLE OF BRITISH WORTHIES

> On the 23rd October of [1707] the first British Parliament met. And so at last the two nations who had been enemies always, who had in three hundred and fourteen battles killed more than a million of each other, were made one.
>
> H. E. Marshall, *Scotland's Story*

According to Professor William Stubbs, who published the first volume of his great *Constitutional History* two years after the foundation of the Second German Reich in 1871, England 'escaped from the curse of the imperial system' in the Middle Ages, and thereby developed its own common law based on custom rather than absolutist decree. Whatever one thinks of Stubbs's theories it is certainly true that no medieval English king called himself Emperor, not even Cnut the Great, who ruled over England, Denmark and Norway. The late Anglo-Saxon kings claimed superiority over the Princes of Wales and Kings of Scotland, and the Norman kings of England continued with these pretensions, while converting them into claims of feudal suzerainty; but none of them used the terms 'Emperor' or 'Empire'. The notion of an Angevin Empire did not enter the arena of historical debate until Kate Norgate put it forward in 1887, while the argument for there being a Norman Empire was not seriously advanced until Professor John le Patourel did so in 1976; and both ideas are deeply controversial.

Formally and constitutionally, there was never a 'British Empire' overseas until Queen Victoria assumed the title of Empress of India in 1876. But this does not alter the fact that there was in reality a first British Empire between 1707 and 1783 (when the thirteen North American colonies became independent) and a second British Empire thereafter, which lasted until the second half of the 20th century. Some English historians even refer to the first British Empire as having begun in 1583, at a time when the English had overseas colonies, and the Scots did not.

All this is important, because it meant that as a matter of law, there was no common nationality in these Islands before the various Acts of Union with Wales, Scotland and Ireland; and British nationality, was a political and legal construct, brought about largely at the behest of the English, rather than by any true assimilation or profound change of sentiment. The consequence, as we shall see, is that British nationalism is a peculiar hybrid and is understood and felt differently by the English and the other three nations involved. In particular, the English have always assumed that being English is the same as being British and, more importantly, that being British is the same as being English; but the other three nations do not suffer from the same illusion.

The Union with Scotland

H.E.Marshall wrote as if the Acts of Union, with Wales, Scotland, and Ireland were the end of history. In her view, they were for everyone's benefit. We all became one country, thereby putting an end, permanently to the mutual antagonisms and enmity which had gone before. There was no thought in her mind that the historical process might be reversed, because she wrote for children and children like a happy ending. This was still the way history was still taught when I was a child in the 1950s, despite the fact that by then both Ireland and British India had been partitioned, and a 26 county Republic of Ireland, India, West and East Pakistan (Bangladesh), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma (Myanmar) had become independent, while Harold MacMillan's 'Wind of Change' was begininig to blow through Africa.

The Act of Union with Scotland in 1707 was different from the Acts of Union with Wales and Ireland. Scotland had been a separate kingdom for almost a thousand years, whereas Wales had been a mere Principality prior to its Acts of Union in the 16th century and there had been many kingdoms in Ireland, prior to Henry VIII's assumption of the title of King. In addition, Wales and Ireland had been (to a greater or lesser extent) conquered by the English in the Middle Ages, whereas Scotland had never been brought to heel. On the contrary, the Scots had prevailed in no less than two long Wars of Independence; and had gone on to establish a polity of their own, which enjoyed a cultural Renaissance in the first half of the 16th century and survived a bottom-up religious Reformation in the second.

The Union with Scotland came about peacefullyand in two stages, known as the Union of the Crowns and the Union of the Parliaments; but, in the view of King James VI & I, more could have been done at the first stage, in 1603. James had travelled down from Scotland, spreading largesse as he came. He immediately stood down the garrisons at Berwick and Carlisle and adopted the title of 'King of Great Britain, France and Ireland'. He wanted there to be a single country called *Magna Britannia* – Great Britain – with one parliament, one set of laws, one national Church and one economy. On first meeting the English Parliament he made an eloquent argument for a 'union of love'; but, as Magnus Magnusson puts it

> He had not reckoned on the hatred and contempt which the English had been schooled for centuries to feel for their irrepressible northern neighbours.

James knew Scotland better but he had also underestimated the reaction of his fellow countrymen:

> What [Scots] they feared more than anything else was a loss of their identity, and of their independence… Their own king was proposing that their kingdom should be swallowed up by that of the Auld Enemy. To many Scots it sounded like betrayal. (Oliver, *A History Of Scotland*)

James's efforts were therefore in vain. New flags were flown and new coins were issued on both sides of the old Border; a new design for the King's Great Seal combined the old English and Scottish seals, and those of Cadwallader and Edward the Confessor, the last kings of Celtic Britain and Anglo-Saxon England; Scottish foreign policy moved with James to London; but there was still a great lack of harmony. The situation deteriorated rapidly when King Charles I tried to impose a new religious settlement in Scotland, and this resulted in the Bishops Wars of 1637 and 1641, and the Scots intervention in the English Civil War of 1642-46. After Charles's execution, the Scots adopted Charles II, and this persuaded Cromwell that it was necessary to bring the northern kingdom to heel. The Cromwellian settlement lasted until the Restoration of 1660; and the restored royalist government continued to rule Scotland with a rod of iron while the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 was hardly 'bloodless' in Scotland. Yet in 1707, after each side had issued threats and veiled threats to break the Union altogether, the Scottish Parliament voted to dissolve itself and merge with the larger one in Westminster. At last, it seemed, the more perfect Union which James VI & I had desired, was brought about peacefully, and by due – if not democratic – process.

The Act of Union of 1707 contained no less than 25 articles. Article 1 stated 'that the two Kingdoms of Scotland and England shall upon the 1st May next ensuing, and forever after, be united into One Kingdom by the Name of GREAT BRITAIN.' Article 2 provided for the succession of the (Protestant) House of Hanover in both kingdoms. Pausing there, the Act provided for a perpetual Union; and there was no provision which allowed for secession from the Union, any more than there was in the Constitution of the United States, drafted some 80 years later. This of course is in contrast to Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007, which expressly allowed a Member State of the European Union to withdraw from the EU.

By virtue of the Treaty of Union, we acquired common nationality in 1707. The Scots did not cease to be Scottish, and the English did not cease to be English; but we all became British as well. What did this achieve? First of all, it brought an unparalleled measure of internal peace. After the Union, there were no more 'wars of religion', either in England or in Scotland, and no more wars of any kind between

the two countries. Further, there were no more 'rough wooings', no more attempted conquests and no more Border raids. Jointly, we developed a parliamentary democracy and limited government, reformed the armed services, the civil service and the factory system; extended the franchise; recognised women's rights; and created the Welfare State. These were British achievements, and the Scots played a full part in them. One has only to think of the Scottish Prime Ministers there have been: Bute, Aberdeen, Balfour, Campbell-Bannerman, Bonar Law, Ramsay MacDonald, Alec Douglas-Home and of course Gordon Brown.

Before the Union, the English had claimed to be the only true descendants of the ancient Britons – this was a central theme of Arthurian literature, starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*; but the Scots had a parallel (and equally spurious) claim. The Union put an end to this rivalry. Since 1707, we have both unquestionably been British. We have shared a common language, and we have produced great works of literature and art, at the same time excelling in the fields of science, medicine and law.

At the time, however, the Act of Union was highly controversial in Scotland, and remained unpopular with many people for years thereafter. Magnusson points out that the Scots have been arguing about it ever since: "Was it the ultimate betrayal of the Scottish nation? Was it an altruistic act of far-sighted statesmanship? Or was it simply a pragmatic response to the inevitable?"

> Of the twenty-five Articles which comprised the Act of Union, no fewer than fifteen were concerned with economic matters. Those who expected that Union would produce an instant economic miracle for Scotland were disappointed. Free trade could be a mixed blessing for an economy as fragile as Scotland's, and there were fears that Scottish producers would be hit hard by English competition. Generally speaking… economic recovery for Scotland does not seem to have got under way until the 1730s.
>
> In any events economics was not the whole of the argument:
>
> Scotland's immediate reaction to the passing of the Act of Union was one of general discontent. Whatever material benefits might come in the wake of Union, something intangible had been lost – a common identity as a nation, perhaps, a sense of having a real say in the nation's affairs.

Scottish discontent turned into resentment as the English administration tried to consolidate the Union. The Scottish Privy Council was abolished in 1708. The House of Lords in Westminster became the ultimate a court of appeal in civil cases for Scotland. A series of anti-Presbyterian Acts infuriated the Kirk: in 1712 the Toleration Act granted freedom of worship to Scottish Episcopalians. In 1713 the House of Commons imposed a tax on malt in Scotland, contrary to the terms of the Act of Union. The Scottish members of both Houses were so incensed that they

agreed that to vote for repeal; and three of the peers who had managed the Union debate in 1706–7 on behalf of the government put forward a Resolution to that effect, which was only narrowly defeated.

Traditionally we were taught that Jacobitism was driven by a loyalty to the Stuart dynasty which had arisen in 1688, as a result of the Glorious Revoolution, the flight of King James VII and II, and the coronation of William of Orange; but in fact the Jacobite Rising of 1715 also reflected Scottish discontent with the Act of Union. In his *History of Scotland* (2009) Neil Oliver explained that, although the Scottish Parliament had voted itself out of existence, it had not been democratically elected or popular with many Scots, whose affections focussed instead on the Kirk. Many felt too that the majority for Union with England had been secured by a combination of bribery and bullying (a favourite accusation levelled by Alex Salmond against the anti-independence campaign during the Scottish referendum campaign of 2014).

The Earl of Mar, who had voted for the Union in 1707, soon became disillusioned with it; and when Queen Anne died and the new King, George I, publicly snubbed him, his response was to raise an army in the Highlands of around 12,000 men – far more than Bonnie Prince Charlie was to lead in 1745. As it happened, both 'the Fifteen' and 'the Forty-Five', as the two Jacobite Risings were known, failed and steps were now taken to root out the Jacobite cause in the Highlands and Islands. The first Ordnance Survey was conducted, new forts were built and a network of military roads was completed. Moreover, the Act of Proscription outlawed Highland dress and the Heritable Jurisdictions Act ended the power once exercised by the clan chief over the clans.

If the Highlands of Scotland experienced repression in the 18th century, Scotland as a whole enjoyed the phenomenon known as 'the Scottish Enlightenment'. Hugh Trevor-Roper, Magnus Magnusson and Neil Oliver all agree on this, though their politics were and are very different. Magnusson pointed out that this was a time when an English visitor to Edinburgh could theoretically encounter Robert Adam, the architect; Joseph Black, the chemist; Adam Ferguson, the sociologist; Henry Home the judge and agrarian improver; David Hume, the philosopher; James Hutton, the geologist; Henry Raeburn, the painter; Allan Ramsay, the portraitist and essayist; William Robertson, the historian; Sir John Sinclair, editor of the First Statistical Account of Scotland; William Smellie, founder of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; and Adam Smith, the economist.

There was a second phenomenon which affected Scotland in the 18th century, which was involvement in the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution, developments which transformed the Scottish economy, at least in the Lowlands, and involved Scottish merchants in the slave trade, just as much as it involved the mercantile classes in Liverpool and Bristol:

> Many of the history books, especially those written ten or more years ago, have it that Scots merchants did not benefit directly from slavery, [or that] this morally reprehensible trade was practised by others, by Englishmen or other

> Europeans, but not by Scots. All these assumptions are false. While it is correct to say that Scottish ports like Greenock and Port Glasgow never witnessed the loading and unloading of slaves, the great Scots families of 18th century commerce were in the slave trade up to their necks. (Oliver, 2007)

Even so, not everyone in Scotland became content. At the end of the 18th century Robert Burns composed a poem about the end of the old Scottish Parliament entitled 'Fareweel to a' our Scottish fame':

O would, ere I had seen the day
That treason thus could sell us,
My auld grey head had lien [lain] in clay,
Wi' BRUCE and loyal WALLACE!
But pith and power, till my last hour,
I'll mak' this declaration,
We're bought and sold for English gold:
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!"

The Temple of British Worthies

In *Peace, Print and Protestantism* (1977) Clifford Davies argued that England was transformed in the century between 1450 and 1550; but in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992) Linda Colley showed that a specifically British identity was created in the century after the Act of Union of 1707, around Protestantism, rivalry with France, and the possession of a strong Royal Navy rather than a large standing army. In particular, the Jacobite Rising in 1745 was unsuccessful because the twin forces of Protestantism and the financial interest of the merchant class motivated Britons to stand firm; and British unity was cemented by the Seven Years' War of 1756-63, which endowed the U.K. with a huge overseas Empire.

The English were reluctant to accept that their identity had changed. They tended to assume that England had absorbed Scotland, just as she had absorbed Wales centuries before, and that 'English' and 'British' were one and the same. This can be seen in the great garden created at Stowe in Buckinghamshire by Lord Cobham in the years after 1707, and in particular in the The Temple of British Worthies.

The idea which inspired the Temple was very old. Just as the medieval Church had a hierarchy of Saints (which, in England, included St Edmund King and Martyr, St Edward the Confessor and most famously, St Thomas Becket), so the courts of Western Europe, royal and aristocratic, recognised Nine Worthies of chivalry. The Nine include three pagans (Hector, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar), three Jews (Joshua and the two Maccabees, David and Judas Maccabeus)

and three Christians (King Arthur, the Emperor Charlemagne and the Crusader Godfrey of Bouillon). They were first described by a Frenchman in the early 14th century in an internationally famous poem 'The Vows of the Heron', though later writers sometimes referred to a parallel set of nine heroines (and the French added a Tenth Worthy, Bertrand du Guesclin, who had chased the English out of much of Aquitaine in the 1370s).

In the modern period, it became fashionable in England to write about the London Worthies, or the Worthies of provincial cities, and London clubs such as *The Athenaeum* sometimes honoured past and present members by exhibiting statues of them which proclaimed them 'worthy' men; but perhaps the most famous exhibition of this nature was the one built at Stowe in the mid 1730s. Here the visitor may behold, in 'The Elysian Fields' (*Les Champs Élysées*!) stone busts of John Milton, William Shakespeare, John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Francis Bacon, Elizabeth I, William III, Inigo Jones, Alexander Pope, Sir Thomas Gresham, King Alfred the Great, The Black Prince, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, John Hampden and Sir John Barnard, M.P.

Those commemorated are all male (with the exception of Queen Elizabeth) and all Protestant (with the exception the poet Alexander Pope). The most remarkable feature though - given that this is supposed to be a list of *British* worthies - is that these figures are English (except William III, who was Dutch). So, there is no Caractacus, no Glendower, no William Wallace, and no Robert the Bruce; and, for that matter, there is no Boadicea, no James VI & I, and no Oliver Cromwell either. Admittedly, there is John Hampden, was a prominent M.P. who supported the God Old Cause in the 1630s and early 1640s; but he was killed in battle in 1643, and did not have to choose between King, Parliament and Army.

In addition, the characters represented at Stowe were all calculated to appeal to English politicians of the early 18th century, and more specifically to the Whigs, rather than to the Tories. They are all reasonably well known, except for Sir John Barnard, M.P., who earned his place in the Garden by virtue of his having opposed Sir Robert Walpole in the House of Commons, thereby displaying a brand of Whiggery which appealed to his patron Lord Cobham.

There are verses inscribed under each of the busts in the Temple, which give us more information; but in the case of King William III, we do not need to know more. He clearly ranked as a British Worthy because (in the Whig view) he had saved the nation as a whole from the Popish tyranny of James II. As for King Alfred, the accompanying verse tells us that he was:

The mildest, justest, most beneficent of Kings;
who drove out the Danes, secur'd the Seas, protected Learning,
establish'd Juries, crush'd Corruption, guarded Liberty,
and was the Founder of the English Constitution.

Why was the Black Prince included in this British Pantheon, rather than his

father Edward III, or for that matter, Henry V? The inscription tells us that the Prince was:

The Terror of Europe,
the Delight of England;
who preserv'd, unalter'd,
in the Height of Glory and Fortune,
his natural Gentleness and Modesty.

But this seems rather vague. A more convincing explanation is that the Prince had gained a reputation in popular historiography as the defender of Parliamentary liberties in the 1380s (a claim repeated in the inscription on a Victorian statue of the Prince in Leeds City Square.) It may also have helped that the Cobham group of Whigs lent support to Frederick, Prince of Wales, in his quarrels with his father George II, in the 1730s.

Francis Drake (c.1540-1596) was famous for his circumnavigation of the Gobe and his part in the defeat of the Spanish Armada:

Who, through many Perils, was the first of Britons
that adventur's to sail round the Globe;
and carried into unknown Seas and Nations;
the Knowledge and Glory of the English Name.

The verse realting to Queen Elizabeth tells us that she was a monarch who believed in all the things the Whigs believed in, although she was in her grave long before the term Whig was first used:

[She] confounded the Projects, and destroy'd the Power
that threaten'd to oppress the Liberties of Europe;
took off the Yoke of Ecclesiastical Tyranny;
restor'd Religion from the Corruptions of Popery;
and by a wise, moderate, and a popular Government,
gave Wealth, Security, and Respect to England.

It is clear, when one walks around the Elysian Fields at Stowe today that the revolutionary consequences of what men like Bacon and Ralegh, Hampden and Gresham once thought and wrote about had been lost, or hidden, under the veneer of Whig respectability and self-satisfaction. But elsewhere at Stowe, there are later memorials to General Wolfe and others who helped to expand the fledgling British Empire.

Heroes of the British Empire

Perhaps the most important results of the Act of Union of 1707 were that English and Scots now participated equally in the British Army, the Royal Navy and the British Empire. Participation in these institutions inspired new loyalties, which were enhanced once the Jacobite Rebellions were suppressed and the Highlanders were recruited into the armed forces. After 1789, warfare with Revolutionary France and Napoleon's French Empire provided a new focus for British identity and patriotism. The government needed the support of the people; and all classes (and both sexes), North and South of the Border, showed a willingness to support the war effort and defend the country. In addition, George III became more attentive to the royal image than his predecessors had been and, after an early period of unpopularity, became genuinely popular.

After 1815 and the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, the idea of being British remained a matter of pride. In particular, the works of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) were based on the assumption that the Union of England and Scotland was the benign outcome of an inevitable historical process, which meant progress. As Magnus Magnusson explained, Scott believed passionately:

> that the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 had helped Scotland to mature out of turbulent and rebellious adolescence into adult nationhood, as an equal partner in the corporate nation-state of Britain.

Scott was a prolific writer and wrote bestselling novels which touched on Scottish and English history. In doing so, he explained Scotland to the English, and England to the Scots; and his books were hugely popular. In particular, in his first novel *Waverley*, Scott contrasted the peaceful and civilised Scotland of 1805, with the situation which had existed in 1745, when Highlander and Lowlander, Jacobite and Hanoverian, Presbyterian and Anglican, Scotsman and Englishman had been at each other's throats. In his last novel *Redgauntlet* he moved from 'the old days of medieval swashbuckling' to the modern era, when 'the old, great, romantic, Jacobite, Scottish days' were over and finished, for good. Jacobitism had become an 'elegy' rather than a realistic political aspiration. He pointed the way forward, and the way forward was by means of the Union.

Scott was by no means alone in thinking this way. Queen Victoria did as much as anyone to popularise the view that England and Scotland might be different, but shared common values. She was also a writer, of journals or diaries, many of them concerned with the Highlands, and many found their way into print, in one form or another. Holidays in the Highlands became popular, with the middle classes.

Finally, there was a fad, then a fashion, and a craze, for Highland dress,

Highland tartan and highland clans, which has been chronicled by Hugh Trevor-Roper in the final section of *The Invention of Scotland* (posthumous, 2008). Trevor-Roper showed, in typically acerbic but entertaining fashion, how in the 19th century 'the apparatus of Celtic tribalism' was assumed by the Scots aristocracy ('those whose ancestors had regarded Highland dress as the badge of barbarism, and shuddered at the squeal of the bagpipe'). The apotheosis of this fashion was when George IV paraded through Edinburgh wearing a kilt of Stuart tartan - disguising himself, snorted Macaulay, 'in what, before the Union, was considered by nine Scotchmen out of 10 as the dress of a thief'. The reader is entitled to ask how far attitudes in England really changed in the Victorian period.

Around 1905, H.E.M. Marshall laid down guidelines for the teaching of history which were to last right down to the second half of the 20th century, both in England (as I can testify) and in Scotland (as Magnus Magnusson assured us). In the closing passage of her *History of Scotland for Children*, she wrote:

> And here [in 1707] I think I must end, for Scotland has no more a story of her own—her story is Britain's story. It was Highlandmen who withstood the enemy at Balaclava; it was the sound of the bagpipes that brought hope to the hopeless in dreadful Lucknow; it was Scotsmen who led the way up the Heights of Abraham; it was a Scotsman, David Livingstone, who first brought light into Darkest Africa, and it was another Scotsman, General Gordon, who there laid down his life for the Empire, so you must read the rest of the story of Scotland in the story of the Empire. For Scotsmen did not do these things alone. They were able to do them because they stood shoulder to shoulder with their English brothers, and fought and laboured, not for themselves, but for the Empire, and so Scotland shares in the glory of the Empire, and adds to it.

It was in this spirit, but fifty years later, that I learned about Robert Clive, (1725 – 1774), also known as Clive of India, who brought a large area in what is now Bangladesh and India under the control of the British East India Company. Modern historians criticise him for becoming a multi-millionaire in the process, for imposing high taxes, helping to bring about famine and even for committing atrocities; but none of this featured in the syllabus when I was young. Instead, we focussed on how he had thwarted French designs on India, and laid the foundations of the British Raj. Even more importantly, he defeated the native prince responsible for the dreadful 'Black Hole of Calcutta.' H.E. Marshall had explained what this was, in suitably shocked, Imperialist, tones:

> One of the native princes who had fought for the French, attacked the British who were living in Calcutta. He killed many of them, destroyed their houses and factories, and those who were left alive he shut up in a horrible prison called the Black Hole. There were one hundred and forty-six prisoners, and

> the Black Hole was so small that there was hardly room in it for them to stand. The windows were so tiny that hardly any air could come through them. When the prisoners were told that they were all to go into this dreadful place they could not believe it. But they soon found out that it was no jest, but horrible, sinful earnest. When Clive heard of this horrible deed, he marched against the native Prince, and utterly defeated him in a battle called Plassey.

Another of our heroes was General Wolfe, who was remembered for his victory over the French at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in Quebec, in 1759. Wolfe had been appointed to command a force which sailed up the Saint Lawrence River to capture Quebec, held by the Marquis de Montcalm. Wolfe's men advanced bravely up the heights, towards the fortress on the top. Let Miss Marshall tells the tale:

> Montcalm, could hardly believe that he saw aright. Then he said quietly, "I see them where they ought not to be. We must fight them, and I am going to crush them." A fierce battle followed. Wolfe was struck in the wrist, but he tied his handkershief round it and went on fighting and giving orders, as if nothing had happened. A second time he was hit. Still he went on. A third shot struck him in the breast. His officers stood sadly round him, when suddenly one of them cried, "See, they run, they run." "Who run?" asked Wolfe. "The enemy, sir," replied the officer. "Thank God," said Wolfe, "I die happy." Then he fell back and never spoke again.

Michael Jary has recently reminded us that the British Empire was a British endeavour, and not an English one.

> Scottish Highlanders became the premier fighting force of the Empire. Hector Munro became Britain's first Governor of Canada. By the mid-18th century more than a quarter of the East India Company's army officers were Scotsmen, as were 220 of the highest administrators in Madras and Bengal. Henry Dundas reigned over the East India Company. Explorers like Mungo Park cut through jungles. David Livingstone became the most famously lost missionary in history. By the end of the nineteenth century, seven of the eight large Indian provinces were headed by Irishmen, while the chief justices of Bengal and Hong Kong were both Welshmen.

I am sure this is all true, and not unrepresentative; but I do not remember being taught this at school. Nor is it all obvious in the Temple of British Worthies.

CHAPTER TEN
JOHN BULL, WILLIAM PITT & HORATIO NELSON

Roll up that map; it will not be wanted these ten years.

William Pitt, 1805

John Bull

The series of wars with France between 1689 and 1815 is sometimes described as a second 'Hundred Years War'. This prolonged series of conflicts began with the Nine Years' War (or War of the League of Augsburg), 1688-1687, and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1715), in which Great Britain and the Dutch Republic confronted the French King Louis XIV (of the House of Bourbon) and his allies. The first of these conflicts is chiefly memorable in these Islands for William of Orange's victory at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), while the second is remembered for the victories of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, at Ramillies (1706), and Oudenarde (1708) but above all for the earlier triumph at Blenheim (1704), while the semi-Pyrrhic victory at Malplaquet (1709, known even at the time as 'murderous Malplaquet') is generally forgotten. Marlborough himself will always be remembered as the donee of Blenheim Palace, and because of his descendant Winston Churchill's books about him.

At the time, the War of the Spanish Succession was more controversial. Whereas the Whigs had won the general election of 1708 and were to win again in 1715, the Tories triumphed in 1710 and 1713; and the Tories were, if not opposed to the War, highly critical of it, and suspicious of Whig motives for waging it. The Tories were at the height of their power in 1712, when Dr John Arbuthnot published *The History of John Bull*. In this satire, John Bull (personifying England) brings a lawsuit against various figures intended to represent the kings of France ('Louis Baboon') and Spain ('Lord Strutt'). The enterprise is not very successful.

The author tells us about his hero at the beginning of the book:

> For the better understanding the following history the reader ought to know that Bull, in the main, was an honest, plain-dealing fellow, choleric, bold, and of a very unconstant temper; he dreaded not old Lewis either at back-sword, single falchion, or cudgel-play; but then he was very apt to quarrel with his best friends, especially if they pretended to govern him. If you flattered him you might lead him like a child. John's temper depended very much upon the air; his spirits rose and fell with the weather-glass. John was quick and understood his business very well, but no man alive was more careless in looking into his accounts, or more cheated by partners, apprentices, and servants. This was occasioned by his being a boon companion, loving his bottle and his diversion. (Artbuthnot).

Naturally, Bull dislikes his enemies, but he also has grave doubts about his lawyer, the Dutchman Nic. Frog:

> Nic. was a cunning, sly fellow, quite the reverse of John in many particulars; covetous, frugal, minded domestic affairs, would pinch his belly to save his pocket, never lost a farthing by careless servants or bad debtors. He did not care much for any sort of diversion, except tricks of high German artists and legerdemain. No man exceeded Nic. in these; yet it must be owned that Nic. was a fair dealer, and in that way acquired immense riches. (Arbuthnot)

John Bull has a sister, Peg who is Scottish. Her parentage is not further explained, but her circumstances are: she is the archetypal poor relation, always sponging off our John. We are given to understand that the Scots are in general poorer than the English, despite having extracted over-generous terms from us by the Act of Union of 1707. Further they are Presbyterians, since they have chosen to follow Jean Calvin, rather than the Pope or Martin Luther:

> Of the three brothers that have made such a clutter in the world—Lord Peter, Martin, and Jack—Jack had of late been her inclination. Lord Peter she detested, nor did Martin stand much better in her good graces; but Jack had found the way to her heart. I have often admired what charms she discovered in that awkward booby…' (The word 'admired' here is used in the sense of 'wondered at').

John tries to settle matters with Baboon at a meeting, but his 'friends' are against the idea, and the Frenchman is as slippery as the lawyers. Here is a sample of the direct negotiations:

> JOHN BULL.—Look you, Master Baboon, as to your usage of your neighbours, you had best not dwell too much upon that chapter. Let it suffice at present that you have been met with. You have been rolling a great stone

> up-hill all your life, and at last it has come tumbling down till it is like to crush you to pieces.
>
> LEWIS BABOON.—Monsieur Bull, I will frankly acknowledge that my behaviour to my neighbours has been somewhat uncivil, and I believe you will readily grant me that I have met with usage accordingly. I was fond of back-sword and cudgel-play from my youth, and I now bear in my body many a black and blue gash and scar, God knows.

Like the War of the Spanish Succession, John Bull's lawsuit is ruinously expensive; but his attempt to settle accounts with his Dutch lawyer Nic Frog run into insuperable difficulties when he is bamboozled by the complexity of legal procedure he has been paying for.

> Law is a bottomless pit; it is a cormorant, a harpy that devours everything. John Bull was flattered by the lawyers that his suit would not last above a year or two at most; that before that time he would be in quiet possession of his business; yet ten long years did Hocus steer his cause through all the meanders of the law and all the courts. (Arbuthnot)

The French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars saw another flowering of satire; and from about 1790, John Bull appeared as a stolid, stocky, conservative and well-meaning character, dressed like an English country squire, and often contrasted with a scrawny, French revolutionary *sans-culottes* Jacobin. Rogers tells us that the character of John Bull featured in more than 500 of these, sometimes as a bull, or bulldog, or 'bull man', but at other times as a farmer, or sailor, or merchant.

> In *The Recruiting Sarjeant [sic] Enlisting John-Bull, into the Revolution Service* (1791), Alecto, one of the three furies in classical literature, is depicted as a hag bearing the cap of liberty on a pike, and holding out French assignats to John Bull as an inducement to 'enter into my Company of Gentlemen Volunteers enlisted in the cause of Liberty,' promising to make him 'one of the Masters of England yourself.' John Bull is a yokel in a peasant's smock and carrying a pitchfork, and his words, conveyed in a broad country dialect, show that he is 'half in love with the sound of your drum' and wants to wear a cockade and 'be a French Gentleman.' However, his affection for his employer, 'Farmer George,' keeps him loyal.

Politics was almost entirely polarised by Napoleon's assumption of power in France, as First Consul in 1799, and then as Emperor of the French in 1804. The effect of this on many Englishmen, including John Bull, was to put an end to any doubts as to the lengths our own government had to go to, to defeat the foreign tyrant:

> In *A Stoppage to a Stride over the Globe* (1803) the much larger figure of Napoleon straddles the globe, asking who dares to stop him in his progress. 'Little Johnny Bull' replies that he will protect 'Old England,' defying Napoleon to try and wrest it from him. In other satires, the sizes are reversed, and John Bull towers over a diminutive Napoleon. While such prints ridicule Napoleon's short stature, they also show that French forces are no match for British courage… In *Tribulation for the Loss of Her Allies, or Iohn Bull's Advice* (1807), Britannia bemoans the fact that all her allies have deserted her, but John Bull reassures her that he will support her to the end. John Bull appears to represent the British people, while Britannia symbolizes the spirit of the nation…(Tamara L. Hunt)

In 1835 a German art historian G,F. Waagen, who was in England for the first time, asked to meet the real John Bull. He was taken to a Bristol coffee house, where he awaited the arrival of a local character, who was thought to be Bull's alter ego:

> From the great respect with which he was received, I concluded that he must be an old and welcome customer. After he had seated himself with some difficulty at one of the little tables, he speedily began to attack the cold breakfast before him. I had never before witnessed such a desperate onslaught. His first attack was directed against a piece of roast beef, as being the main body of the enemy, and the principal pièce de résistance. He repeated his charges with such vivacity, and at such short intervals, that the large mass was rapidly decreased, to my astonishment, and was soon entirely overcome.... The quantity of ale with which he washed all down was in due proportion. (Rogers)

Punch magazine was founded in 1841 and finally closed in 2002. Throughout its existence, it was famous for its cartoons, which often featured John Bull. Here he appears as the personification of England, rather than Britain, though the unspoken assumption is that there is no difference, since he frequently sports the Union Jack as part of his attire. He is always fat, even obese, but is a picture of health nonetheless, and the embodiment of English patriotism as well as prejudice. He is usually a farmer, though sometimes a sailor. He does not favour new ideas, and so is a conservative, when he is not a Conservative and is often puzzled by new questions (for example regarding Ireland or China), just as he is bemused by new ideas (like tariff reform or votes for women).

John Bull had a different persona in German newspapers and periodicals, James Hawes's brilliant study of Anglo-German relations (*Englanders and Huns*, 2014) has numerous cartoons which illustrate the growing fear and hostility between the two nations. So, at the time of the Schleswig Holstein crisis of 1864, Bull is

already depicted as a blustering figure, a hypocrite who is prone to issuing threats to intervene, when he has no intention of doing so. He is also shown as a much diminished figure, with no real power on the Continent of Europe.

After Bismarck's triumph in the Franco-Prussian War, there was a series of cartoons in Germany which showed that the Iron Chancellor was considering an alliance, or even a customs union with the new French Republic, 'harnessing European energies in an anti-British drive'. By way of contrast, John Bull is variously shown as a mere fairground attraction ('the Fat Child', whose obesity makes him a laughing stock), or more simply as a vexed and troubled Englishman, resenting his exclusion from the corridors of power, while at the same time determined to pursue his own interests, like fishing.

From the 1840s to the 1890s, John Bull was also shown in German cartoons as a man who was living in a state of perpetual fear of immigration and in particular of alien German 'paupers', who somehow contrive to flood into England, though Captain Webb only swam the English Channel in 1875. At the turn of the 20th century, John Bull becomes a bogeyman or ogre, a bully who is at one and the same time responsible for unspeakable atrocities in South Africa (while lecturing Germany on the need to behave properly), and attempting to limit and control her legitimate efforts to acquire colonies and a Navy commensurate with her new power and status. By contrast, the British Empire is sometimes depicted as a titanic octopus, with its tentacles embracing every part of the globe.

'Billy Pitt, Damn his eyes'

Pitt the Younger became Prime Minister at the age of 24 in 1783 and held office until 1801, and again from 1804 until his death in 1806, while also being Chancellor of the Exchequer for much of the time. He was a Churchillian figure, famous for standing up to a foreign tyrant, but also infamous for attempting to stamp out domestic opposition, for fear of revolution. According to A.L. Rowse (in *Historians I have Known* (1995)) G.M. Trevelyan, the last of the 'Whig' historians, thought little of Pitt, because of the severity of his repressive legislation and, in conversation with Rowse, he even cursed him ('Billy Pitt, damn his eyes)'. Rowse thought that Pitt had only done what was necessary. Pitt's legislation was certainly novel and far-reaching. Individuals who published seditious material were prosecuted and punished, and the writ of *habeas corpus* was even suspended. The Combination Acts prohibited workers from entering into contracts for the purposes of improving conditions of employment or calling or attending a meeting for such purposes, and from attempting to persuade another person not to work or to refuse to work with another worker.

The repression even affected country pursuits. The game laws, which were notoriously harsh already, were tightened even further as the landowners in Parliament battened down the hatches, for fear that Jacobin principles might spread

in England. Poachers were now thought to be politically dangerous as well as a social menace. Hence, Lord Ellenborough's Act of 1803 created ten new felonies. It became a capital offence, for example, to resist lawful arrest by 'shooting, attempting to shoot at, stabbing, or cutting'. The Night Poaching Act of 1816 was to mandate seven years' transportation for any person caught out at night in any forest, chase, park, wood, plantation, close, or other open or enclosed ground, having in his possession 'any net, gun, bludgeon or offensive weapon'. Sir Samuel Romilly claimed that, if this measure had been fully enforced, it would have enabled the courts to transport half the rural population to Australia.

Pitt battled on. His First Coalition collapsed in 1798. A Second Coalition, consisting of Great Britain, Austria, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire also failed to work, and culminated in the defeat of the Austrians at Marengo and Hohenlinden in 1800. The French Revolution revived religious and political problems in Ireland, and in 1798, Irish nationalists attempted a rebellion and called for French help. Pitt's response was to put down the rebellion and then engineer the Act of Union with Ireland. The Irish Parliament in Dublin was abolished, but the Irish were promised electoral emancipation for the majority Catholic population in return. However, they did not get it, because King George III would not agree to it. This led Pitt to resign in 1801.

After the French Republic made peace with Russian Empire and Austria in 1801, France and Britain signed the Treaty of Amiens, which led to a year or so of peace between the two principal combatants; but war broke out again soon afterwards; and in May 1804 Pitt became Prime Minister once again, though his political position was much weaker than before. The situation in Europe was scarcely more promising. In May 1804 the French Republic proclaimed an hereditary Empire, with Napoleon as Emperor, although his coronation did not take place until December. The French Empire now consisted of 104 departments; but Napoleon was clearly intent on making his Empire 'wider still and wider'.

1805 was a year in which there was victory at sea, and catastrophic reverses in Europe. On 21 October Nelson won a crushing victory over the combined French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar, which ensured British naval supremacy for the rest of the war. At the Lord Mayor's Banquet toasting him as "the Saviour of Europe", Pitt by saying:

> I return you many thanks for the honour you have done me; but Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example.

A couple of days earlier, Napoleon had smashed the armies of the Third Coalition, involving Austria, Russia, and Sweden, at the Battle of Ulm (16-19 October and he was to repeat the treatment at Austerlitz in December 1805. When told of these terrible events, Pitt is reputed to have picked up a map of Europe and said propheyically 'Roll up that map; it will not be wanted these ten years'. He was right,

more or less. Gillray drew a famous cartoon showing Pitt and Napoleon dining off a steaming pudding, which is the globe, with Pitt taking the Oceans and Napoleon taking Europe. This again was a more or less accurate portrayal of the geopolitical reality. The British went on to scoop up most of France's remaining colonies, while (according to by Geoffrey Ellis) the French Empire now expanded into areas which lay well beyond the old notion of the 'natural frontiers' which had once seemed proper to Louis XIV. In fact, early in 1811 the 'Grand Empire' reached its maximum territorial extent, embracing 130 departments with a total population of some 44 million. If we include the satellite kingdoms of Italy, Spain, and Germany, many other confederate states on the Rhenish right bank and Switzerland, the core of Poland, and the northeastern littoral of the Adriatic, Napoleon had 80 million subjects.

Most people are aware of the fact that in 1940, following the fall of France and the retreat from Dunkirk, Britain stood alone against the might of Nazi Germany. The national mood then was encapsulated in David Low's cartoon, 'Very well, then, alone!', which shows a single British solider stranded on a rock, facing a raging sea and shaking his fist in defiance at a swarm of planes, swooping towards him like birds of prey. We also know that the British Army had also stood virtually alone, against the might of the Kaiser's Spring Offensive in 1918, when General Haig issued his 'Backs to the Wall Order'. But we should also remember that the British also stood alone against Napoleon in the period after Austerlitz; and that there was no Churchillian figure to rally then, since Pitt died on 23 January 1806.

Pitt's Act of Union

The cheerful English view of Pitt's Act of Union with Ireland in 1801 was put to children by H.E.Marshall in 1905:

> Up till this time Ireland had still a separate Parliament, just as Scotland had before 1707 A.D.. Ireland made laws for itself, and in fact, except that it had the same King as Britain, there was no union between the countries. Pitt and other wise men felt that this was not right. They saw how much more difficult it would be for Napoleon to conquer Ireland if it was really united to England and Scotland. So they worked hard till at last it was arranged that the Irish Parliament should join the British.

So that's all right then. In fact, however, the position was a little more complicated, even from an English point of view.

After 1691 Ireland was controlled by the minority Protestant Ascendancy. This governed through by means of the Penal Laws, which discriminated against both Catholics and Protestant Dissenters, who were not allowed to hold office or vote; but in the late 18th century, liberal elements among the ruling class were

inspired by the example of the American Revolution, and made common cause with the Catholics to achieve reform. The chief focus of agitation was parliamentary reform: there had long been a parliament in Dublin but it was subservient to the Westminster Parliament, because of Poynings' law of 1494 (which gave Westminster the right to veto Irish legislation), and and the Declaratory Act of 1719 (which gave the British the right to legislate for Ireland).

When the French joined the Americans in support of their Revolution, London called for volunteers to defend Ireland against the threat of invasion; and many thousands joined the Irish Volunteers. In 1782 the Volunteers used their new power to compel the Crown to grant an independent assembly (known as 'Grattan's Parliament'), albeit that this still excluded Catholics and Dissenters. Then the Irish Patriot Party, led by Grattan, demanded a widening of the franchise; and the Dublin Parliament enacted legislation, allowing some propertied Catholics to vote, though they could still not be elected or appointed to public office.

The prospect of genuine reform inspired a small group in Belfast to found the Society of United Irishmen in 1791. This included Catholics, Protestant Dissenters of several kinds, and even some individuals from the Protestant Ascendancy; but the outbreak of war with France after the execution of Louis XVI forced the Society underground. The United Irishmen now declared for independence, with the aid of the French if necessary. Wolfe Tone, leader of the United Irishmen, travelled to the USA to seek American assistance also. In 1798 'the year of the French', the Irish rose but were put down with great bloodshed.

Pitt's Act of Union, which abolished Grattan's Parliament altogether and made Ireland part of the British state, was therefore motivated by considerations of (British) security, and was not simply an act of generosity, as H.E.Marshall suggested, though it was also an attempt to redress some of the grievances behind the rising of 1798. However, there was widespread bribery to ensure that both Houses of the Irish Parliament would vote for their own dissolution (as there had been in 1707 in Edinburgh). Worst of all, Pitt assumed that the Act of Union would be accompanied by Catholic Emancipation; but George III refused to agree. This led to a widespread feeling of betrayal in Ireland; and Daniel O'Connell began agitating for Emancipation as early as 1811.

The Irish Nationalist, or at least Sinn Fein's, point of view was set out by P. S. O'Hegarty(in *Sinn Fein An Illumination* (1919):

> When Pitt and Castlereagh forced through the Act of Union, they forged a weapon with the potentiality of utterly subjecting the Irish nation, of extinguishing wholly its civilisation, its name, and its memory, for they made possible that policy of peaceful penetration which in less than a century brought Ireland lower than she had been brought by five centuries of war and one century of almost incredibly severe penal legislation. In the history of the connection between England and Ireland the vital dates are 1691, 1800, and 1893: in 1691 Ireland lay for the for the

first time unarmed under the heel of the of the invader; in 1800 began the peaceful penetration of Irish civilisation by Englishcivilisation; 1891 by the foundation of the Gaelic League Ireland Ireland turned once more to her own culture, alive to her separateness, her distinctiveness, alive also to her danger.

By changing the seat of government from Dublin to London, the Act of Union not alone killed the incipient nationalism of the Garrison, but it, in time, totally alienated them from the Nation, by attaching them to English parties, English ways and making their centre London, and not Dublin. The landed proprietors and aristocracy followed the seat of government, and London became their capital also. So that, early in the nineteenth century, the Garrison classes, which towards the end of the eighteenth century had come dangerously near to making common cause with the Nation, shifted their political and social centre to London, and became a strength to England and a weakness to Ireland.

In O'Hegarty's view, Catholic Emancipation, when it came in 1829, brought Ireland nought for her comfort:

At the same tame the relaxation, and eventual abolition, of the Penal Laws maneuvered the mass of the Irish people also Londonwards. English was the language of the courts, of the professions, of commerce, the language of preferment and the newly-emancipated people embraced English with a rush.

The Uncommon Market

Napoleon's Empire embraced almost the whole of Continentall Europe outside Russia. France herself included 130 departments but the 'Grand Empire' was far wider and more populous. In a sense it was also a family business. In a way which reminds one of the Mafia (or at least the TV Mafia) Napoleon took to installing his relatives as rulers in many of the European states he overran and re-organised. So, Joseph Bonaparte replaced the Bourbons in Naples; Louis Bonaparte was installed on the throne of Holland; Joachim Murat became Grand-Duke of Berg; Jerome Bonaparte married the King of Württemberg's daughter; while Stéphanie de Beauharnais married the son of the Grand Duke of Baden and Eugène de Beauharnais was appointed King of Bavaria.

The critical moment in the economic war with Britain came in 1806, when Napoleon issued the Berlin Decrees. As Andrew Roberts describes in *Napoleon the Great* (2015):

> All trade and all correspondence with the British Isles is forbidden. Every British subject, of whatever state or condition he may be … will be made a prisoner of war. All warehouses, all merchandise, all property, of whatever nature it might be, belonging to a subject of England will be declared a valid prize … No ship coming directly from England or the English colonies, or having been there since the publication of the present decree, will be received in any port.

This established the 'Continental System', which was strengthened by subsequent decrees issued in Milan and Fontainebleau in 1807 and 1810. In January 1807 Britain retaliated by means of a series of Orders-in-Council. France and all her tributary states were to be blockaded and all neutral vessels intending to go to or from the French Empire had to sail to Britain first, pay duties there and obtain clearance. In particular this meant that all American ships must buy a licence in a British port. The British also started to press thousands of American sailors for service in the Royal Navy. As Geoffrey Ellis described a generation ago, when the EC consisted of only nine countries:

> The Napoleonic power bloc roughly corresponded, at least in its most secure parts, to the area of the original Common Market of our own time. Spain, Portugal, the Illyrian provinces, and the duchy of Warsaw, though part of the 'Grand Empire' too, did not experience the continuity and immediacy of French rule to which subject Germany, the Benelux countries, and Italy were exposed. (*Napoloeon's Continental Bloackade* (1981):

However, as Ellis also explained:

> Napoleon's aim was not to create a European Common Market, but rather a protected one at home and (so far as possible) a preferential one for France abroad. Its internal features, quite apart from its economic prematurity, hardly square with those of the Common Market in de Gaulle's time. It seemed nice, then, to stand the analogy on its head and present an image of Napoleon's 'Uncommon Market'.

Like Donald Trump, Napoleon's wanted to ensure that his own country came first. So the Market created by the Continental System was in theory intended to be for the benefit of all members, but in practice it was run for the benefit of France; and as such it was never likely to appeal to others. In fact, it was even unpopular with many of the French, especially in areas bordering the sea. Ship-building and trades such as rope-making declined, as did many other industries dependant on overseas markets, such as the linen industry. Some even closed down. The ports of Marseille, Bordeaux and La Rochelle suffered.

This 'Uncommon Market' was not all bad. The North-East of France, and parts of modern Belgium, enjoyed increased profits due to the lack of competition from British goods (particularly textiles). There was a boom in the agricultural sector in Italy; and in Alsace, the special subject of Ellis's attention; but the Continental System, viewed as a whole, simply did not work. The customs men who policed it were disliked everywhere, and many proved to be corrupt, as did a number of French generals charged with surveillance. The British proved adept as smugglers, and there were thousands of inlets in Holland, around the North and Baltic coasts, in the Iberian peninsula, and later Italy, where eager customers awaited their arrival. Napoleon himself had to constantly override his own Decrees, to meet more important economic objectives. So, he authorized special industrial loans from reserve funds to offset periodic crises in that sector; and issued special licences to trade with the enemy, when essential stocks ran low, or when a grain mountain, or a wine lake was found to exist on the Atlantic littoral.

On one occasion Napoleon had to take a particularly humiliating step. As Andrew Roberts explains

> In 1807, for example, because Hamburg and the Hanseatic towns couldn't manufacture the 200,000 pairs of shoes, 50,000 greatcoats, 37,000 vests and so on that the *Grande Armée* required, their governors were forced to buy them from British manufacturers under special licences allowing them through the blockade. Many of Napoleon's soldiers in the coming battles of the Polish campaign wore uniforms made in Halifax and Leeds.

This story was probably in H.E.Marshall's mind when she wrote:

> Napoleon forbade other countries to trade with Britain. But it was of little use, and so ill did he succeed that his very own soldiers were dressed in British-made cloth and wore British-made boots.

The Continental System finally disintegrated in 1813, when military and fiscal exactions in the defence of the Empire became more and more oppressive, and the widespread fighting cut across inland trade routes. The System was designed to hit us where it hurt most – in the pocket, since one-third of Britain's direct exports and three-quarters of our re-exports went to continental Europe; but we got through by virtue of sheer power. Geoffrey Ellis stressed two factors above all: the superiority of the Royal Navy and Britain's stronger financial and commercial infrastructure. Andrew Roberts wrote

> The Continental System failed to work because merchants continued to accept British bills-of-exchange, so London continued to see net capital inflows. Much to Napoleon's frustration, the British currency depreciated against European currencies by 15 per cent between 1808 and 1810, making British

> exports cheaper. By contrast, imports fell significantly, so Britain's balance of trade was positive, which it hadn't been since 1780. (*Napoleon the Great*)

The UK was even strong enough to take on the USA. When I was a child Lonnie Donegan sang a ballad entitled *The Battle of New Orleans*, which I considered unpatriotic; but it was memorable.

In 1814 we took a little trip
Along with Colonel Jackson down the mighty Mississip'
We took a little bacon and we took a little beans
And we caught the bloody British in the town of New Orleans

We fired our guns and the British kept a-comin'
There wasn't nigh as many as there was a while ago
We fired once more and they began to runnin'
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico

This ditty commemorated an American victory over a numerically superior British force in 1812; but honours were even, if one considers the War of 1812-1815 as a whole.

So the British came through, just as they were to do again in 1918 and 1945, having had their backs to a lonely wall for many long years, they were inclined to remember their own contribution to the war effort, rather than Russia's in 1812 or Prussia's in 1815. In the words of the ineffable Miss Marshall, writing around 100 years after Waterloo:

> The French were led by Napoleon Bonaparte. He was one of the most wonderful men who have ever lived. Beginning life as a poor unknown soldier, he soon rose to be leader of the French army. He rose and rose until the people made him Emperor of France. His one desire was to be great and powerful, and he did not care how others suffered or how many people were killed so long as he had what he wanted. He made war all over Europe. He conquered kings and gave away their thrones and crowns to his own friends and relatives, and only the British were strong enough to stand against him.

Britain owed much of her success to the work of the Royal Navy, whose supreme hero was Lord Nelson (1758-1805), the victor of Trafalgar; but we should note that the fleet commanded by Nelson on that occasion was a British one, just as the army led by Wellington was a British Army. Typically, though, the famous signal sent by Nelson to the sailors at Trafalgar (who must have included many Welsh, Scots and Irishmen) was: "England expects that every man will do his duty."

CHAPTER ELEVEN
THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

> And now it is all gone, like an insubstantial pageant faded, and between us and the old English time there lies a gulf of mystery, which the prose of the historian will never adequately bridge. They cannot come to us, and our imagination can but feebly penetrate to them.
>
> J.A.Froude, *History of England*

The collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century C.E. was a real catastrophe, despite recent attempts to play it down, on the part of academics who favour the idea of 'late Antiquity' and some TV historians who have taken a shine to the barbarians. The scale of the catastrophe can gauged by the various attempts which were made, in medieval times, to re-invent the political Roman Empire, and the admiration for its culture evidenced by the various Renaissances which have been identified by historians: the Carolingian Renaissance, the 12th century Renaissance, and the better known Italian Renaissance, starting in 15th century Florence, and moving on to Rome and Venice.

Gradually, artistic talent, scientific ingenuity and philosophical enquiry led to a growth of self-confidence. Medieval men and women started to believe they could see further than the Ancients, because they stood on their shoulders; but even so, they looked to the past rather than the future. They were re-inventors, rather than pioneers. The discovery of America, the development of the printing press, and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century did a great deal to change attitudes; but it is arguable that it was not until the Age of the Enlightenment in the 18th century that there was a commonly-held belief that there had been a widespread improvement in morals and manners since classical times, along with a startling improvement in material conditions. In the 19th century there were certainly a great number of believers in the doctrine of progress, at least in Western Europe and the U.S.A.; but it was not until 1920 that J. B. Bury published his book *The Idea of Progress* (ironically at the moment when the First World War had produced a good deal of scepticism about the whole idea.)

The Economic Miracle

In the first half of the 19th century, Britain saw a *Wirtschaftswunder* – an economic miracle - far more wonderful than the one experienced in West Germany in the years following the Second World War, if only because it was entirely home-grown, rather than financed by American money. Few Englishmen living in 1851 (the date of the Great Exhibition) would have denied that there had been dramatic progress in this country, at least in material terms, in previous decades. This was evident in terms of population, GDP, average income, trade, manufacturing, finance, shipping and transport, which had all grown substantially, in some cases spectacularly.

According to the prevailing Liberal philosophy, the British economy grew as a result of the abolition of the corn laws, the adoption of free trade, the abolition of tolls on internal trade, the harnessing of the steam engine, the spread of the factory system and the division of labour. Bank rate remained constant and inflation was non-existent. The United Kingdom was a single market without parallel, as well as 'the workshop of the world.' The trade unions were as yet without any real influence; and, when Karl Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, he was a prophet crying in the wilderness, so far as the British were concerned.

The economic miracle may have peaked in 1851 but it certainly did not come to an end. Praising Britain's constitution and political stability as well as her economic and social achievements, Bernard Porter characterized the mid-Victorian era as Britain's 'Golden Years.' Sir Ernest Llewellyn Woodward, Professor of History in Oxford between the World Wars concurred:

> For leisure or work, for getting or spending, England was a better country in 1879 than in 1815. The scales were less weighted against the weak, against women and children, and against the poor. There was greater movement, and less of the fatalism of an earlier age. The public conscience was more instructed, and the content of liberty was being widened to include something more than freedom from political constraint....

The above should be read alongside Sir Llewellyn's rider, though this may reflect a shame felt in the 1930s rather than the 1870s:

> England in 1871 was by no means an earthly paradise. The housing and conditions of life of the working class in town & country were still a disgrace to an age of plenty. (*The Age of Reform*, 1938)

It is doubtful if any such doubts afflicted Samuel Smiles (1812 – 1904), the author of *Self-Help*, first published in 1859. Smiles promoted the idea that hard work and thrift (rather than Marx's class struggle) were the answer to poverty – though he

also attacked materialism and laissez-faire government. His most famous book sold 20,000 copies within a year of publication, becoming "the bible of mid-Victorian liberalism", and Smiles became a sort of Victorian 'guru'. By the time of his death in 1904 the book had sold over a quarter of a million copies; but he was also the author of numerous other books, whose titles tell us much about the tastes of his readership: *Character*, 1871; *Thrift*, 1875; *Duty*, 1880; *Life and Labour*, 1887; and *Lives of the Engineers* (5 vols., London, 1862).

Meanwhile, in Europe and America, the late 18th and early 19th century was a period of startling political change, with revolutions in America, France and South and Central America, the foundation of ultimately successful nationalist movements in Italy and Germany, *coups d'etat* and plots in many other countries, and (last but not least) the rise and fall of the first Napoleonic Empire. It was not for nothing that the Marxist Eric Hobsbawm labelled the years 1789-1848 *The Age of Revolution*.

The exception of course was Great Britain. We had no political revolution here; and, contrary to what people generally believe, no social revolution either.
The first proposition is not controversial. The second is. It has long been taken for granted, not least by Marx, that capitalism was the agent of a bourgeois revolution, which transformed the medieval feudal society of Western Europe; but, looking at 19th England (and indeed Britain), I cannot see that the theory can be sustained, despite the admittedly huge changes in the composition of English society by the end of Queen Victoria's reign.

When we consider what happened at Peterloo in 1819, the popularity of John Bull, the depth of the opposition to the repeal of the Corn Laws, the history of the Game Laws, the failure of the Chartist and Republican Movements, the remarkable survival of aristocratic titles, country houses and estates and the House of Lords, the phenomena known as deference voting, the failure of Gladstone's Liberal Party to carry Home Rule for Ireland and the Marquis of Salisbury's long periods in office, we have to conclude that England remained a bastion of aristocratic rule, right down to the Liberal landslide of 1906, and perhaps even down to 1914.

Iin my view, this is not very different from the conclusion reached by David Cannadine and Christ Bryant in their very different studies of the British aristocracy. Bryant points out what is obvious to students of Local History - certainly in South Yorkshire – that the aristocracy played an extremely important part in the development of capitalism:

> Nor was it just what happened on the land that was of interest; the exploitation of mineral rights underneath it became one of the most significant new sources of aristocratic income. Landowners had mined coal for centuries, but as shallow shafts and adits were exhausted and engineers developed means of extracting much deeper sea-coal, aristocrats stood in a uniquely privileged position. They could lease their land and harvest the royalties, or make direct investments of their own. Wealth bred wealth, as the appetite for coal increased exponentially. Right across the country, peers

> became prominent mine-owners. (Bryant, *Critical History of the British Aristocracy*).

The Idea of Progress

Throughout human history, there have been several grand theories as to how history develops. These are sometimes classified into linear and circular, although H.A.L.Fisher (1865-1940) saw no pattern at all. In his *History of Europe*, he wrote ironically that:

> Men wiser and more learned than I, have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations; only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.

Marxists like Christopher Hill thought that this was the same as saying that history was 'one damned thing after another', which they found unacceptable; but then Marxists believed that history progressed in a linear fashion, according to the scientific law of dialectical materialism, from primitive communism, to feudalism, to capitalism, imperialism and scientific socialism. Unfortunately for Marxists, the last of these stages was the one reached by the USSR before it fell apart, whereas (according to the theory) it should have gone on to become a communist society, in which the apparatus of the state would have been rendered unnecessary.

The Ancient Greeks proposed that there had been a Golden Age, when there was universal peace and harmony. Men and women did not have to work, because the Earth provided food in abundance, and people lived for centuries, before dying peacefully in their beds. However, in the classical paradigm, it was all downhill after that, because next came the Age of Silver, when men only lived for one hundred years and spent their time fighting; and after that came successively worse stages of development (the Bronze and Iron Ages), interrupted only by the Heroic Ages, when the quality of life was (briefly) much improved.

The early Christians believed they were living in the end of days, as did many Christians throughout the Middle Ages. After 1000 CE, there were always those who preached the premature arrival of the Millennium (though, when the real end of the Second Millennium eventually arrived, it proved to be something of a damp squib). According to this idea, Christ would return, and the world would come to an end, imminently. The most important prophet of this 'philosophy' – if it merits the name – was Abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135 – 1202), whose work and followers lie at the centre of Norman Cohn's highly influential book *The Pursuit of the*

Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages (1957). Joachim propounded the theory that the world had known three ages, the Age of the Father, (corresponding to the period covered by the Old Testament); the Age of the Son, (between the advent of Christ and 1260) and the Age of the Holy Spirit. In this third Age the Catholic Church would be replaced by the Order of the Just; and Joachim's followers were frequently condemned as heretics, even after one of them identified the Order of the Just with the Franciscan Order of Friars.

Although Cohn's book was principally concerned with medieval movements, it concluded with the rule of the monstrous 'King' John of Leiden, an Anabaptist who took over the city of Münster in 1534 and held it for over a year, to the great consternation of its Prince-Bishop and all established authorities. During that time, he expelled all Catholics, acted as the prophet of God, and instituted a communist regime, as well as taking many wives; but what struck fear into the hearts and minds of the Establishment – both in Germany and elsewhere – was John's ability to sway the masses and preside over a social as well as a political revolution, however temporary. The Anabaptist regime in Munster became widely notorious. To be called an Anabaptist in the late 16th and even 17th centuries, was much the same as being called a Communist in 1950s America.

We might think that this kind of thing could never happen in 'Merry England', whenever that was; but consider the Fifth Monarchy Men, who were not in the least interested in restoring a time of merriment and frivolity. Like some modern Islamic fundamentalists, they sought to establish a celestial kingdom on earth, though in the name of Christ, in succession to the monarchies established by the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans; and for a time they attracted a following in Puritan England. Just after the Restoration, they mounted what turned out to be a terrorist attack in London. It was not a success, but is mentioned in Samuel Pepys's Diary:

> Thursday 10 January 1660/61
>
> These Fanatiques routed all the Trainbands that they met with, put the King's life-guards to the run, killed about twenty men, broke through the City gates twice; and all this in the day-time, when all the City was in arms. There were about 31, whereas we did believe them to be at least 500. Their word was, "The King Jesus, and the heads upon the gates." Few of them would receive any quarter, but such as were taken by force and kept alive; expecting Jesus to come here and reign in the world presently, and will not believe yet but their work will be carried on though they do die.

The Whig Interpretation of History

One of the most popular works of history ever written was Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; but Gibbon was not a believer in progress. Instead, he

believed in a Golden Age of his own, which he set during the reigns of the 'Five Good Emperors' - Nerva (96–98 CE), Trajan (98–117), Hadrian (117–138), Antoninus Pius (138–161)and Marcus Aurelius (161–180):

> If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom. The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hand of four successive emperors, whose characters and authority commanded respect.

This view of Ancient History stands in stark contrast to the view of the not so distant past taken by Lord Macaulay, in his bestselling *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848). Macaulay's central message was summarised by Herbet Butterfield in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), when he condemned the tendency of all 'Whig' historians:

> to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present….whether we take the contest of Luther against the popes, or that of Philip II and Elizabeth, or that of the Huguenots with Catherine de' Medici; whether we take Charles I versus his parliaments or the younger Pitt versus Charles James Fox, it appears that the historian tends in the first place to adopt the whig or Protestant view of the subject, and very quickly busies himself with dividing the world into the friends and enemies of progress.

Throughout the 19th and well into the 20th century, it was this view of history which predominated in England.

Although Macaulay's *History* sold well, it purveyed a narrow view; and the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl (author of *Napoleon For and Against*) considered Macaulay's *Essays* as "exclusively and intolerantly English". This becomes apparent when we read what Macaulay had to say about the Irish and the Scots (or at least the Highlanders):

> The Irish Chief he portrays as merely sunk in ignoble rusticity and sensuality, with no autonomous polity worthy of the name; cut off by the English penal laws from the possibility of improvement, his existence is merely animal: 'shooting, fishing, carousing, and making love among his vassals'.

> The native Irish were 'almost as rude as the savages of Labrador'. Elsewhere there are comparisons with Red Indians and Hottentots, while the feelings of the French troops in Ireland send Macaulay back to the gazetteer: for them it

> was like banishment to 'Dahomey or Spitzbergen'…The Scottish Highlands were in 'a state scarcely less savage than that of New Guinea.
>
> (Burrow, *Liberal Descent*).

According to John Burrow, the whig tradition was carried on, in the late 19th century, by three Regius Professors of Modern History at Oxford. This requires some explanation, in view of the fact that none of them could be described as Whigs in the political sense.

In the Middle Ages and for a long time thereafter, there were only two Universities in England – Oxford and Cambridge - although each of them had several colleges; but traditionally students went there to study philosophy, ancient history, theology, law or medicine, not History. It was a radical departure when the Oxford History School was established in 1850, and when it was decided that Modern History should be studied, although the reader will be surprised to discover that Modern History began in 286 C.E. (The syllabus was only changed in the 1980s).

Oxford set the pace for England and Wales (while Scotland and Ireland had very different traditions in education); and the first three Regius professors of Modern History there were William Stubbs (1866-74), Edward Augustus Freeman (1884–1892); and James Anthony Froude (1892-4). In some ways, these three were very different: they certainly wrote about different periods, and they had radically different political views; but in Burrow's percipient analysis, they were all whigs in the sense that they all believed that society had progressed, both materially and morally since the Middle Ages, and had done so by processes of gradual change, and in particular (so far as Stubbs was concerned), through the gradual growth of Parliamentary sovereignty.

Stubbs was remembered, for many decades afterwards, as the author of a *Constitutional History of England*, which traced the origins of the Westminster Parliament – the Mother of Parliaments – back to the Barons War of 1264-7 and Simon de Montfort; but he started with the Anglo-Saxons. The most remarkable of his views nowadays is perhaps his opinion that the Anglo-Saxon settlement of England was not a settlement but 'an extirpation or eviction of the Britons, and a colonisation'. This was an idea which the Welsh Nationalist MP and historian Gwynfor Evans and many others, including for example Eric John, have come to regard as simply ridiculous; and which now seems to be incompatible with the evidence of the genes (although the significance of genetic evidence is highly controversial).

In Stubbs's view, the history of the English Parliament started in the 13th century, though its roots were older. As Burrow puts it:

> The first volume of Stubbs' *Constitutional History,* culminating in Magna Carta, is a record not only of growth, the growth of feudalism and territorial monarchy, but of survival. The dormant seeds of future liberties lie embedded in the local institutions bequeathed by the English settlement…

However, we had to thank the Normans as well as the Anglo-Saxons for our free institutions, because, for Stubbs:

> The Norman Conquest was beneficial in that it saved England from the worst effects of feudalism (in particular the growth of the 'great fiefs' so familiar in medieval French history), because William the Conqueror was able 'to impose unity, and make the nation conscious of its unity.

Once again, it is clear that this founder member of the historical establishment was Anglocentric, and also that he suffered from a very mild and refined case of Francophobia. He thought the worse of France because it had suffered the twin disasters of highly centrifugal and highy centralized systems of government – a fully fledged feudal system, followed by centuries of *dirigisme* under Louis XI, Louis XIV and Napoleon. In fact he felt sorry for the French

> The old map of France is full of memories - recollections of Gaul and Rome, the empire of the Caesars, Burgundians and Acquitainians, Franks and Armoricans - Clovis, Charles the Great, and St Louis - knights, troubadours, saints and heroes. The history of the land was written on its face. The map of modern France is a catalogue of hills and rivers, a record of centralization, codification, universal suffrage, government by policemen. Probably the work of simplification will never be carried so far in England, but there is a tendency towards it…

Freeman, author of the multi- volume *History of the Norman Conquest* (1867–1876), was much more of a 'Germanist' – he sought the origins of Englsh freedom and democracy in the German forests described by Tacitus in the 1st century C.E. As Burrow explains it:

> England's Teutonic settlement was celebrated as the origin of the national tradition of liberty. England's Teutonic invaders were settlers and pioneers. They had not, as in Gaul, established themselves as a landed aristocracy - as later did the Normans - served by an underclass of native Romano-British; these had been, it was confidently asserted, exterminated or driven to the margins in the Welsh mountains, not interbred with or enslaved.

As Freeman himself wrote:

> All the features of English life, in fact, all its characteristic features were already there [in Anglo-Saxon times]. We see mills grinding along the burns, the hammer rings in the village smithy, the thegn's hall rises out of its

> demesne, the parish priest is at his mass-book in the little church that forms the centre of every township, reeves are gathering their lord's dues, forester and verderer wake the silent woodland with hound and horn, the moot gathers for order and law beneath the sacred oak or by the grey stone on the moor.

Was Anglo-Saxon England, for Freeman, the English Age of Gold? One might be forgiven for thinking so but, at bottom, he was a believer in progress, while his successor Froude was an imperialist.

Froude was the author of many books, but was chiefly famous for his *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth* (12 volumes, 1856–1870). He attached a great deal of importance to religion, and had no doubts that Protestantism was superior to the Catholic version of Christianity in every respect; and that the English Reformation had set England on the road to success, while adherence to Rome was a recipe for backwardness and (in the case of Ireland and Spain) decay and decline.

> Without the spiritual vigour and the bold, open eye of the heroes of the Reformation, England would have been condemned to the fate of Spain: an increasingly rigid enforcement of dogma no free intelligence could believe, and moral and material stagnation or degeneration… The loveliest and most fertile provinces of Europe have, under her [the Roman Church's] rule, been sunk in poverty, in political servitude, and in intellectual torpor, while Protestant countries, once proverbial for sterility and barbarism, have been turned by skill and industry into gardens, and can boast of a long list of heroes and statesmen, philosophers and poets.

Froude admired Henry VIII; but above all he admired Elizabeth I and the sailors who set out from England in her time to circumnavigate the globe, harry Spanish shipping and started to break out of Europe and into world markets:

> The privateering exploits of the Elizabethan seamen took no more than their share of attention, with a recognition of the role of greed and the element of atrocity. [Froude celebrated] their bold, free, pioneering individualism…He played a major part in the creation of that rhetoric, now so over-familiar; it represented the more boyish, optimistic side of his nature and it nourished the imperialist political creed he built for himself.

One is reminded of A.L.Rowse's stirring *Expansion of Elizabethan England*, though this was published in 1955; and perhaps of Liam Fox's plea that British businessmen should become buccaneers once more, when we leave the EU.

For Froude, it was Elizabethan England, the setting for Spencer's *Faerie Queen* (1590), which came closest to being the backdrop for our Golden Age.

> Elizabeth's reign had seen an ideal balance between classes: the social and economic questions which had been so acute and distressing in Edward's reign had been solved. 'When religion revived, the country righted of itself.' In Elizabeth's time 'the yeomen and peasants were living in a golden age. The war of class, the struggle between rich and poor, had ended.' (Burrow).

Despite this rosy view of the past, Froude was a 'progressive'; but not every Victorian was. There were Conservative and Radical politicians and writers who thought that the modern age left much to be desired; and argued, that we (or at least some us) had at one time been happier. From their different standpoints, William Cobbett, John Ruskin, William Morris, Father Lingard and Cardinal Gasquet all criticized the morality of modern capitalism and the narrowness of the conventional wisdom concerning our past. In the 20th century many of the fundamental tenets of the Whig view of history were undermined by academic historians; but they did not destroy it at the popular level; and it still has an enormous following, because it is dear to many hearts.

The Invention of Tradition

The great Victorian historians who concerned themselves with the history of England all thought that England had made considerable progress in preceding centuries. They did not look to the past as the location of a Golden Age, but as the place where our origins, and the reasons for our progress were to be found. However, other people – politicians, civil servants, poets, musicians, artists, sculptors, impresarios and businessmen – went further and sought to re-create ancient traditions, to serve present purposes.

Eric Hosbawm and Terence Ranger showed in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) that this phenomenon was pan-European, indeed worldwide; and it reached its height in the years between the proclamation of the German Empire in 1871 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. In France, Bastille Day was created in 1880, nearly 100 years after the storming of the Bastille; and many of the ubiquitous statues of Joan of Arc were erected at this time, though Joan was executed in 1431: (see Paris in 1874, 1895 & 1899, Compiègne in 1882, Rheims, in 1889 & 1900, Domrémy-la-Pucelle in 1891, and Bonsecours, 1892). Joan was made a Saint of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, but only in 1920, while the first performance of George Bernard Shaw's eponymous play only took place in 1923. Meanwhile the histories written by Jules Michelet (1798-1874) did much the same thing for France as Macaulay, Froude and J.R.Green did for England, although the style and content of his writing was radically different.

In Germany (1770-1831) Hegel told his students and readers that the Prussian State was the inevitable outcome of all historical development, as well as God's will;

and after the unification of Germany, historians did their best to link the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (962-1806) with the new Second Reich, although the first of these names was only coined in 1512. Nevertheless, German politicians spent large sums of money in erecting monuments, not only to Bismarck, but to Arminius (aka Hermann), who annihilated three Roman legions in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (or *Hermannschlacht*) in 9 C.E. In the USA, the ceremony of saluting the flag in schools was instituted around 1880, and the late 19th century saw the construction of most of the great buildings around the Capitol in Washington D.C., which have since become symbols of the American Republic, although they postdate the Declaration of Independence by 100 years.

Hobsbawm and Ranger were mainly concerned with the British Isles, and their book contained sparkling essays about Scotland and Wales. These were controversial at the time, because the 1980s marked a pause in the movements for the devolution of power from Westminster and Whitehall to local assemblies. Referenda had been held on the issue in the 1970s, but they had failed in each case. It was only in the late 1990s that the devolution settlements we are familiar with today were put in place.

Hugh Trevor-Roper's contribution *The Highland Tradition of Scotland* was begun in order to lend support to those who opposed devolution for Scotland. It showed how the kilted Highlander, with his distinctive tartan and bagpipes, was a product of 19th century literati, Romantics and businessmen, who developed it from the Highland dress prescribed for the Highland Regiments of the British Army after the defeat of the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. In other words, there was nothing traditionally Scottish about it:

> Before the Union, it did indeed exist in vestigial form; but that form was regarded by the large majority of Scotchmen as a sign of barbarism: the badge of roguish, idle, predatory, blackmailing Highlanders who were more of a nuisance than a threat to civilized, historic Scotland. And even in the Highlands, even in that vestigial form, it was relatively new: it was not the original, or the distinguishing badge of Highland society.

Prys Morgan's essay about Wales told a similar story about 'Merrie Wales'. In *From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period*, he described how traditional Welsh culture had died and been (partially) revived within the space of a few years. He pointed out that by 1815:

> Nearly all Welsh picturesque customs were 'now wholly laid aside', and some druidic beliefs had never been held at all. The Hon. John Byng visited Bala in 1784 and again in 1793 and complained that 'Within ten years there seem'd an alteration in the manners of the people.' Signs of Welsh merriment were gone, and the Welsh were becoming like the English.

With regard to what we now regard as traditional Welsh dress for women:

> The tall hat and the great cloak… was not in any sense a national costume, but it was turned deliberately into a national costume for women in the 1830s as a result of the efforts of a number of people, the chief of whom was Augusta Waddington (1802-96), usually known as Lady Llanover. In 1834 at the Cardiff Royal Eisteddfod she won the competition for an essay on the desirability of speaking Welsh and wearing Welsh costumes… In 1834 she was not even clear as to what a national costume was, but within a very short time she and her friends had evolved a homogenized national costume from the various Welsh peasant dresses, the most distinctive features of which were an enormous red cloak worn over an elegant petticoat and bedgown and a very tall black beaver hat, in the style of Mother Goose.

It caught on; and Welsh dolls, dressed in the fashion of 'Dame Wales' remain popular even in todays' mass markets.

Perhaps the best essay in Hobsbawm and Ranger's book was that written by David Cannadine concerning the British monarchy, which re-invented itself by means of new ceremonial, at coronations, state funerals, royal weddings and investitures. It deployed these new 'traditions' at Queen Victoria's two Jubilees, and (in India) at the *Durbar*. It was also at this time that those grand statues were erected, in London and the English provinces, of Boadicea, Alfred the Great, Richard I, the Black Prince, and even Oliver Cromwell.

Cannadine writes throughout of the British monarchy; and one of the points he makes is that the Victorians and Edwardians liked to dwell on the sanctity of the monarch; but it should be remembered that there is a distinctly English side to this narrative. The monarch is Head of the Church of England, and has been since the time of Henry VIII; but the same is not true (if it ever was) in Scotland and Wales. The Church of Scotland has always been different, and one of the features of the difference is that the Moderator of the General Assembly is the Head of the Kirk. Meanwhile, the Church in Wales was disestablished by Act of Parliament in 1920. The position in Ireland is much more complicated again.

We have already noted A.J.P.Taylor's remark that the tendency of the English to confuse 'England' with 'Britain' and 'English' with 'British' was still noticeable throughout the Empire in Colonial times. This is confirmed by Terence Ranger in his contribution to *The Invention of Tradition* concerning Africa:

> An acute observor of the governor's *indabas* with chiefs in northern Rhodesia in the 1920s remarked that they were 'designed as a parade of His Majesty's benignity'. [The message was] 'All you here are one people - subjects of the King of England'.

CHAPTER TWELVE
SPLENDID ISOLATION

> Our isolation, if isolation it be, was self-imposed. It arose out of our unwillingness to take part in Bismarck's 'log-rolling' system. We are not good at the game, and so, while they are all bartering favour for favour, promise for promise, we have stood alone in that which is called isolation – our splendid isolation, as one of our Colonial friends was good enough to call it.
>
> Lord Goschen, 1896

The English have long been regarded by Continental Europeans, as 'insular'. It was the French academic André Siegfried (1875 – 1959) who told his students "*Messieurs, l'Angleterre est une île, et je devrais m'arrêter là*." (Loosely translated: "Sirs, England is an island, and I ought to stop right there.") President Charles de Gaulle said much the same in 1963 when he vetoed the first British application for membership of the European Economic Community (or EEC): "England in effect is insular. She is maritime; she has very marked and very original habits and traditions." There was some truth in these statements, of course, but there was also a lot more to be said. In any case, insularity of character does not necessarily involve isolationist policies. De Gaulle's veto did not prevent us from joining the EEC ten years later. Nor did it mean that our membership of the European Union was necessarily doomed to fail.

Palmerston's Red Line

Viscount Palmerston was Foreign Secretary for much of the 1830s and 1840s and Prime Minister between 1855 and 1858 and again from 1859 to 1865. His 'joke' about the Schleswig-Holstein question is well known ("Only three people have ever really understood the Schleswig-Holstein business—the Prince Consort, who is dead—a German professor, who has gone mad—and I, who have forgotten all about it"). It is less well known that, as Prime Minister, he made a speech to the House of Commons in July 1863, which seemed to imply that Britain would not stand aside if Denmark were threatened by German aggression. But, in the event, Palmerston did nothing when the Prussians and Austrians invaded in 1864.

Yet Palmerston was already famous, and in foreign countries infamous, for intervening in the affairs of other countries. At home, he was known as 'Lord Pumice-stone', the fiery politician who had delivered the *civis Romanus sum* speech, asserting that he would intervene anywhere in the world in defence of British interests. Abroad, he was thought to favour Liberal and even radical republican causes; but this fiery reputation was misleading. In fact, he was intensely conservative and a staunch monarchist, wanting nothing more than to preserve the balance of power.

Palmerston undoubtedly authorised or approved of the use of 'gunboat' diplomacy on numerous occasions, in Naples, Portugal, Greece, China, Japan, Mexico, Syria, Iran and even Afghanistan; but there were many occasions when he deliberately chose not to intervene – for example during the crises in Belgium and Spain in the 1830s, in Uzbekistan in the 1840s and in Poland in 1831, 1846 and 1863. Indeed he was often criticised for his pusillanimity, letting down traditional allies and failure to maintain Britain's standing on the international stage. To quote the Jasper Ridley 'the British people were always more Palmerstonian than Palmerston'.

Palmerston always underestimated the Prussians. He thought that the French would easily defeat them in the field, if it came to military confrontation; but, at the same time, he knew full well that the Prussian Army far outnumbered the British. So, when he drew his red line in relation to Denmark, he was bluffing. Indeed, he later argued that he had never meant to imply that British assistance would be provided to the Danes, but rather that Denmark might not find herself alone, because the French and the Russians might help her. This attempt to 'spin' his own words convinced no-one.

The reality was that there was no real possibility that Britain would intervene in 1864. Sympathies at home were keenly divided and Palmerston did not even represent the whole of his own party. Queen Victoria was strongly opposed to intervention: her late husband Albert had after all been German and she thought she knew his mind on the subject. Moreover, her daughter Victoria had married into the Prussian royal family in 1859, though her son Edward had marred into the Danish in 1863.

In any event, there was nothing the British could do militarily. We had a powerful Navy but we lacked the capacity to land an amphibious force which could have materially assisted Denmark. We were a world power, but no superpower; and the Prussians were fully aware of this. The Prussian general and strategist von Moltke said that England was 'as powerless on the Continent as she is presuming'. The result was that in 1864, the Prussians and Austrians had little difficulty in overrunning Schleswig-Holstein.

The political problem was that the Danes took Palmerson seriously. On 11 February 1864 they appealed to Great Britain for help, relying in part on his speech, and in part on an old treaty of 1720; but Palmerston sat on his hands. In June he made a further statement to the Commons saying that Britain would not go to war with the German powers unless the existence of Denmark as an independent power

was at stake or that her capital was threatened. Accordingly, when the Prussians and Austrians did invade Denmark, a majority of the British cabinet voted to send the Royal Navy to defend Copenhagen; but Palmerston arranged that no such assistance was sent. The Conservatives understandably took the view that he had betrayed the Danes, and a vote of censure was carried by nine votes in the House of Lords. In the Commons the Conservative M.P. General Peel asked:

> Is it come to this, that the words of the Prime Minister of England, uttered in the Parliament of England, are to be regarded as mere idle menaces to be laughed at and despised by foreign powers?

To which Palmerston replied, somewhat weakly

> I say that England stands as high as she ever did and those who say she had fallen in the estimation of the world are not the men to whom the honour and dignity of England should be confided.

In August 1864, Palmerston justified his conduct to his constituents:

> I am sure every Englishman who has a heart in his breast and a feeling of justice in his mind, sympathizes with those unfortunate Danes (cheers), and wishes that this country could have been able to draw the sword successfully in their defence (continued cheers)... Ships sailing on the sea cannot stop armies on land … we must acknowledge that we have no means of sending out a force at all equal to cope with the 300,000 or 400,000 men whom the 30,000,000 or 40,000,000 of Germany could have pitted against us...

It is questionable whether Britain's standing in the world was much diminished by the failure to intervene in support of Denmark. The Prussians must have concluded that they could continue with their designs with impunity; but they would probably have reached that conclusion anyway. The war of 1864 was only the first of three by which Bismarck brought about the unification of Germany; but it is not clear that Britain even wanted to prevent this from happening. Many in Britain still feared France more than the German powers and, even in 1870-1, many welcomed the advent of a strong new power in Central Europe, as a factor which contributed to stability. This was a view which even Palmerstonians adopted in 1866, when the Prussians defeated the Austrians.

The UK stood aside in 1864-5 and did so again when the Prussians conquered annexed Hanover in 1866. This is remarkable, because Hanover had been united with Britain between 1715 and 1837, and we might have been expected to intervene, or at least protest. However, the union between Britain and Hanover had always been a personal one; and no-one had ever wanted to cement this relationship by bringing about an 'ever increasing union' of the British and German peoples, by

parliamentary or other means. In addition, the personal relationship had cooled:

> The first Hanoverian kings preferred their German principality to their British kingdom; but when George III ascended the throne the inclination of the balance changed. That Sovereign was proud of being an English king. Hanover passed more and more into the background, and when William IV died it was with some sense of relief that the English nation found that their Queen was excluded from its throne [by the Salic law].

There were other reasons for British unwillingness to become involved in the affairs of Hanover in 1866. Prussia had often been our ally, notably in 1815 when her contribution to the Allied victory at Waterloo had been crucial; and British foreign policy was still largely concerned with the containment of France. In addition, the line of least resistance was to stay out of continental warfare, concentrate on the Empire, and rely on the Royal Navy for defence. Lastly, the events of 1864 had shown that the U.K. was quite unable to intervene with any effect in a dispute involving the major continental powers. As Bismarck remarked, 'dreadnoughts have no wheels', and the UK was effectively without power or influence in the heart of Europe.

Salisbury and Splendid Isolation

Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister between 1885-6, 1886-92 and 1895-1902 as well as being Foreign Secretary for much of that time. 'Splendid isolation' is a term which was used by some to describe his foreign policy; but it was never a conscious policy of his, or for that matter of any British government.

It is true that for most of the 19th century, the UK was in a position to stand apart from the rest of Europe, if not from the rest of the world. She was not the most populous European state, but she had the largest economy in terms of finance, trade and industry, and (despite the loss of the American colonies) she had the largest overseas Empire, which continued to grow. In addition the Royal Navy was the largest and most powerful in the world. The classic demonstraton of this was when Nelson was able to defeat the combined French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar in 1805, and when Pitt's successors were able to negate Napoleon's Continental Decrees, between 1806 and 1812; but the Orders in Council which were the British response to Napoleon's Decrees were a matter of self-defence and retaliation, and were dropped in favour of free trade, as soon as the long War was over.

There is no question that British national feelings were stirred during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and they have re-surfaced very strongly in time of war ever since, especially when there has been fear of invasion; but they have not usually taken either a pacific or isolationist form. On the contrary,

John Bull, the essence of English popular feeling, was often depicted in Victorian cartoons as a kind of vigilante, standing up to, if not thrashing, the local bully.

During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, the British public first gave voice to authentic Jingoism, and it had a Russophobe accent:

> We don't want to fight but by Jingo if we do,
> We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too.
> We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true,
> The Russians shall not have Constantinople.

So public opinion was not the only relevant factor in the making of foreign policy. There were also issues of principle. In 1850, the Whig Lord Palmerston argued for intervention abroad, wherever necessary, in the so-called 'Don Pacifico debate' in the House of Commons. He referred to:

> The sense of duty which has led us to think ourselves bound to afford protection to our fellow subjects abroad, are proper and fitting guides for those who are charged with the Government of England; and whether, as the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say 'Civis Romanus sum' [I am a Roman citizen]; so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England, will protect him against injustice and wrong.

Note once more, the reference to England rather than Britain; but note also the opposite point of view, which was put by the Tory leader Lord Derby in 1866:

> It is the duty of the Government of this country, placed as it is with regard to geographical position, to keep itself upon terms of goodwill with all surrounding nations, but not to entangle itself with any single or monopolising alliance with any one of them; above all to endeavour not to interfere needlessly and vexatiously with the internal affairs of any foreign country.

Party politics had an even more important part to play. In 1850, Gladstone, who was Prime Minister four times, Chancellor of the Exchquer four times, and an M.P. for over 60 years, objected to Palmerston's linking Britain with the slave owning Roman Empire; but in 1876, in his pamphlet *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, he attacked the Disraeli government for its indifference when the Ottoman Turks put down a Christian uprising in Bulgaria with great violence.

Much of what Salisbury said and did is now so hopelessly politically incorrect that he has now almost forgotten. He did not believe in Home Rule for Ireland, despite the fact that the Irish Parliamentary Party had won 86 seats in the general election of 1885, which left Charles Stewart Parnell holding the balance of power in

the House of Commons. He thought that the Celtic Irish were unsuited to self-government:

> Democracy works admirably when it is confined to people who are of Teutonic race.... You would not confide free representative institutions to the Hottentots. (Bardon)

He did not believe in democracy, or in progress, or in the 'enabling State', at least not in the same way as modern Liberals and Socialists do. In 1872 he mused on what might be regarded as one of the great counterfactual questions: what if the South had won the American Civil War; and he answered his own question: "America would now have been nicely divided into hostile states, and we should have had as little to fear from Washington as…from Paris."

However, Salisbury never did propose that the UK should engage in a policy of 'splendid isolation'. Indeed he explicitly argued against it. The paradox was explained by the First Lord of the Admiraty, Lord Goschen in 1896:

> Our isolation, if isolation it be, was self-imposed. It arose out of our unwillingness to take part in Bismarck's 'log-rolling' system. We are not good at the game, and so, while they are all bartering favour for favour, promise for promise, we have stood alone in that which is called isolation – our splendid isolation, as one of our Colonial friends was good enough to call it.

The key to understanding why the policy was attributed to Salisbury is the central importance of Germany in the late 19th international relations. For centuries France had been the *Grande Nation* – the Great Nation. Louis IX (r.1226-1270) had been the arbiter of Europe, the leader of several of the later Crusades, as well as a Saint of the Roman Catholic Church. Louis XIV (r.1643-1715) had made France the most powerful and most culturally influential country in Europe. Napoleon I had created an Empire which had been far bigger than Charlemagne's at its height, though it was short-lived. But all this had changed during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, when the Prussian *blitzkrieg* led to the resignation of Napoleon III, and to France's relegation to the second division. The Prussians also created a new and united German Empire, or *Reich*, which was rapidly recognized as the most populous and most prosperous country on the Continent of Europe, and a serious competitor for both the U.K. and the U.S.A. on the world stage.

Salisbury was a realist and he was well aware of the new military and geo-political reality. For centuries the UK had no standing army at all, and even in Victorian times, the Army in Europe was small, and there was no conscription. The nations of Continental Europe, on the other hand, had mass conscript armies. Salisbury knew that Britain would be able to make her weight felt if she had a large army; but it was political suicide to propose conscription in Britain. He therefore cut his cloth according to his means.

Unable to do anything much about the size of the Army, Salisbury did take steps to strengthen the Navy: he oversaw the Naval Defence Act 1889, which facilitated the spending of an extra £20 million on the Navy over the following four years. Since Trafalgar, Britain had possessed a navy one-third larger than their nearest naval rival; but now the Royal Navy was set to the Two-Power Standard - "a standard of strength equivalent to that of the combined forces of the next two biggest navies in the world".

Diplomatically, Salisbury looked to Germany as his mainstay, just as Palmerston had once looked to France. As Dr Steele explains:

> Militarily weak and disinclined to expend blood and treasure in a trial of strength on Continental battlefields, Britain needed to be on good terms with France's successor as the strongest power on land if she was to count for something in Europe. The Eastern question taught Salisbury to look to Bismarck and Germany for solutions that Britain could not impose.

Steele also explains why it was not difficult to explain this course of action to the British:

> Though the German option was to lose some of its attractions, there was really no alternative from the later 1870s: Germany's interests and those of Britain were convergent; each had her own reasons for wishing to perpetuate peace in the European heartland. They were not yet serious rivals for trade and colonies. Dynastic ties, religious sympathies, memories of Waterloo and earlier campaigns, and to a considerable extent, their political cultures made them natural partners, with the reservations inherent in international relations.

This did not mean that Salisbury wanted to join any formal alliance with the new Germany; but he did strike several deals with Bismarck, who was Chancellor of the new Reich between 1871 and 1890. His attitude to Europe as a whole was again summarised by Steele:

> [Britain]... was part of Europe, but with a difference. A semi-detached policy was both right and possible for her. She must work with the European powers, as the British public expected, but she ought not to sacrifice too much of her freedom of action to their treaty-based alliances. So long as she preserved her essential freedom Salisbury was ready and willing to align Britain with a power, or powers, whose interests coincided with hers in the long or the short run.

There was even one area where Salisbury took active steps to bring about a rapprochement, and that was the Mediterranean. It had become vitally important to

protect the Suez Canal and the sea lanes to India and Asia, and Salisbury did this by means of the Mediterranean Agreements with Italy and the Austrian Empire in 1887.

The chief 'deal' done between Bismarck and Salisbury was that struck at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, which led to the creation of Rumania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria. The Congress was hosted by Bismarck and attended by Disraeli (now Earl of Beaconsfield); but Salisbury played a leading role, and it was thought that the British had brought back 'peace with honour'. The reason may now seem somewhat obscure, but the Treaty of Berlin secured Cyprus for the British Empire, and more importantly limited Russian influence in the Balkans.

For the rest, it was a matter of good relations rather than treaties. Bismarck formed alliances between Germany, Austria and Russia (1873), Austria alone (1879), Germany, Austria and Russia again (1881) and Russia alone again, by way of a 're-insurance' treaty (1887); but there was no formal deal with Britain.

Heligoland

After Bismarck fell from power, Britain and Germany entered into the Treaty of Kiel, by which Britain ceded the tiny North Sea island of Heligoland. The island thereby became German, in a surprising surrender of sovereignty unusual for Victorian Britain and very surprising (at least superficially) considering Salisbury's reputation as the champion of Britain in foreign affairs.

Britain had acquired Heligoland towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars. She and Sweden had opposed Napoleon, whereas Denmark and Norway had supported him. By 1814, after the disastrous retreat from Moscow, the French Emperor was tottering to defeat in the field and various peace agreements were signed. One of these provided for Denmark to cede Heligoland to Britain, though a general settlement had to wait for the Treaty of Paris in 1814, and then (as a result of Napoleon's return during the famous 'Hundred Days') the Congress of Vienna in 1815. These saw a more widespread rearrangement of territories in Europe and around the world and, in particular, a considerable enlargement of the British Empire.

Looking at a map now might suggest that Heligoland was of some strategic importance. It is within 25 miles of several German ports - Cuxhaven, Wilhelmshaven and Bremerhaven - with direct access to the North Sea and far closer than any other British port to the Skaggerak, which connects the North Sea to the Baltic.. However in 1814 none of these 'obvious' geographical features were of any strategic importance. The traditional enemy was France; Germany was not even a nation state; and Cuxhaven and the other German ports mentioned were small. In any case there was no 'German' navy and construction of the Kiel Canal was not begun until 1887. Accordingly, the reason Britain wanted Heligoland had nothing to do with Germany and the Germans. Heligoland was only useful in so far as it served to contain French naval designs on Scandinavia or German territories. Britain had

ruled the waves since the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and its naval supremacy was not to be seriously challenged for another century.

This explains why Britain did nothing much with Heligoland between 1814 and 1890, not even bothering to fortify it as a naval base. In true British parsimonious fashion, the cost of administering the tiny territory even came to be criticised in Parliament. Instead of becoming a base, Heligoland became a popular tourist resort for the German upper class. The island also attracted German-speaking artists and writers, who enjoyed the freedom of the benignly ruled, if somewhat neglected, island, including the poet Heinrich Heine and August von Fallersleben (who wrote the lyrics for the German national anthem). Heligoland was also a refuge for revolutionaries involved in the German revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

The creation of the new German Reich in 1871 did not immediately lead to Anglo-German hostility, but things changed after Wilhelm II became Kaiser in 1888 and more especially after Bismarck's resignation in 1890. The newly united Germany, with a population greater than that of either France or Brtiain and an increasingly strong economy, began to pursue a quest for colonies and, crucially, to build an imperial fleet to rival the Royal Navy.

Germany's colonial expansion also clashed with that of Britain. In particular, the strategic implications of its aim to link the Congo to East Africa were in conflict with Britain's ambitions for a rail link between Uganda and the port of Mombasa in Kenya. As a result, discussions were held to determine spheres of influence in what would later become the colonies of Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar. These discussions moved slowly until Britain introduced the proposal to cede Heligoland to Germany in return for a limit on Germany's ambitions in East Africa. This led to the negotiation of the Treaty of Heligoland-Zanzibar, also known as the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890, which was eventually signed in June 1890.

The policy of ceding Heligoland to Germany was controversial in Britain . The Victorians did not usually cede parts of the British Empire and it aroused the opposition of Queen Victoria. She said 'It is a shame to hand [the Heligolanders] over to an unscrupulous despotic Government like the German without first consulting them'. Nevertheless, the issue of consultation and the principle of self-determination, now the major stumbling block to any settlement with Spain over Gibraltar, or with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, was not a serious problem in 1890. Despite the queen's concern; the Heligolanders were never consulted. The deal was done, as part of the international power game, despite royal and parliamentary misgivings. Lord Salisbury pointed out that consulting Her Majesty's subjects (for example in Malta, Cyprus or India) might lead to the dissolution of the British Empire.

Salisbury had majority support for his diplomacy. The expense of maintaining Heligoland, when it was thought to serve little purpose, continued to be resented; and some commentators were scathing in their descriptions of the island, variously referring to it as 'a summer bathing spa for a few Germans'. Someone else commented that 'the main reason for having Heligoland is that so no one else can

have it'. Meanwhile, the hard-headed Admiralty took the view that Heligoland was an 'untenable advance base'.

Much later, in his book *The World Crisis* (1923-27), Winston Churchill wrote that Salisbury had exchanged Heligoland for Zanzibar 'with a complete detachment from strategic considerations'. With all due respect to Churchill, this seems to be little more than hindsight. It seems clear that the Admiralty's view was right at the time. If Heligoland was indeed to have had any strategic significance in the late 19th century, Britain would have needed to devote far more resources to it. This concurs with a modern historian's favourable view that the Treaty ofKiel saw:

> the exchange of a small territorial white elephant to protect the South-Eastern approaches to the Nile Valley, remove a bone of contention with Germany, and extend British commercial interests in Zanzibar.

German politicians were in the main delighted. The acquisition of Heligoland removed a threat to their access to the North Sea and the concessions in East Africa were not large. On the other hand, Bismarck - who had at one time favoured the treaty of 1890 - is said to have changed his mind. It was he who gave the agreement the title 'Heligoland-Zanzibar' in order to belittle Germany's gains by it. He is even said to have declared 'we have given up the trousers for a button'.

A Pipe Dream

In the 1890s ‘Splendid Isolation’ was not a policy. It was a caricature of the foreign policy of Lord Salisbury, drawn by his critics rather than his spokesmen, to suggest that the policy wasn’t working. In practice, his policy in Europe was to keep on the right side of the dominant Continental power, which was Imperial Germany; and this worked reasonably well, until Bismarck was ‘dropped’ as the pilot of the German ship of state, in 1890. Thereafter, it became much more difficult to predict German intentions, since it was the mercurial Kaiser Wilhelm II who was at the helm. Dealing with him must have been a bit like dealing with Donald Trump, at least in the first year of the latter’s Presidency. Even so, a last attempt was made, in 1898, to establish some kind of understanding between Great Britain and Germany, especially because it was now that Franco-British relations almost reached boiling point, as a result of the dispute over Fashoda on the Upper Nile. It was not to be. The UK’s worst fears were aroused by the enactment of the new German Naval Laws of 1898-1912, which vastly increased the strength of the German Imperial Navy, and promised to increase it still further. The U.K. responded by building larger numbers of ships of her own, including the new Dreadnoughts. The result of this failure to reach an accommodation with Imperial Germany was cold war, a series of crises and hot war in 1914.

If ever we were truly isolated, it was during the Boer War of 1899-1902, and

the isolation was not so splendid. The War came about as a result of the conflict between the British Empire (still growing wider still and wider) and the Boer Republics in the interior of South Africa. At first it revived the spirit of Jingoism at home, and Salisbury's government won a landslide victory in the 'Khaki Election' of 1900; but the policy of coercion which the British government adopted with regard to the Boers was hugely unpopular abroad, where Britain was pilloried and caricatured in an extremely hostile fashion. As James Hawes has so vividly chronicled in *Englanders and Huns* (2014), the Boer War even enabled the Germans to portray the British for the first time as ruthless and militaristic bullies.

The period of 'splendid isolation' came to an end in 1904, with the series of agreements between Britain and France known as the *Entente Codriale.* These put an end to various disagreements between the two countries regarding their colonial empires (in particular in Africa and Indochina) and in A.J.P.Taylor's words (drawn from his *Struggle for Mastery in Europe*) 'replaced the *modus vivendi* that had existed since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 with a more formal agreement. It also led on to a degree of military co-operation between the two countries which was to be critically important when Germany invaded France in 1914.

There was something else which put an end to the glory days of the British Empire and took the shine off the British reputation for fair play at this time; and this was the continuing problem of Ireland. Lord Salisbury had a nephew, Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930), who succeeded his uncle as Prime Minister in 1902 – hence the expression, 'Bob's your uncle'. Previously, Balfour had gained several nicknames, including 'Pretty Fanny', 'Tiger Lily', and 'Miss Balfour', but the most memorable was 'Bloody Balfour', which he had gained as Chief Secretary for Ireland between 1887 and 1892.

Balfour rejected any idea of granting Home Rule to Ireland and refused to treat Parnell, the leader of the Irish Nationalists in Parliament, as the true representative of the Irish people. He believed in being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, or (in the language of the day) in 'coercion-cum-kindness'. So, he introduced and enforced the Irish Crimes Act of 1887, which was designed to counteract and penalise the activities of Parnell's Land League. The Act provided that conspiracy and intimidation were punishable on summary conviction, that is to say, without a jury. In addition, whole districts could be 'proclaimed', so that trials could be held elsewhere, and with a special jury, which was likely to be composed of landlords; and eventually Balfour even proscribe the Irish Land League altogether.

It has become a tenet of liberal, as well as Liberal, thinking that, if Home Rule had been granted to Ireland earlier, this would have avoided all the violence and the bloodshed which ensured between 1916 and 1922; but that is impossible to say. At the time, Balfour and other Conservatives believed that there was no halfway house between rule from London and complete independence. In 1910, when Asquith was pushing for Home Rule once again, Balfour asked:

Is it not in the nature of things that in such cases incomplete concessions only

increase the appetites they are intended to satisfy, while they provide new instruments for extorting more?

All we can say is that the policy of coercion did not work either. In September 1887, there had been a mass-meeting and a riot in Mitchelstown, County Cork, where the the police fired on the crowd. Three rioters were killed and 54 policemen injured. The event became known as 'Bloody Sunday'; and the nickname 'Bloody Balfour' stuck.

The period between 1886 and 1914 certainly saw the failure of the reformist wing of Irish nationalism. The Liberals made three attempts to introduce Home Rule for Ireland. In 1886 the first Irish Home Rule Bill was defeated in the House of Commons and never introduced in the House of Lords. In 1893 a second Bill passed the House of Commons, but was defeated in the Lords. The third Bill was enacted between 1912 and 1914, but only by using the new procedure under the Parliament Act of 1911; but it never came into force, because it was overtaken by the outbreak of the First World War.

Meanwhile there was a development which O'Hegarty saw as one of the three most important events in the history of the connection between England and Ireland, which was the foundation in 1893 of the Gaelic League. This had been preceded by the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language in 1876, the Gaelic Union in 1880 and the Gaelic Athletics Association in 1884. The League itself promoted the use of Irish in everyday life. Within four years, it had over 400 branches. It seemed that a genuine Gaelic revival was under way.

In Irish Nationalist history the next significant event was the foundation by Arthur Griffith, in 1905, of a new political party called *Sinn Féin* ('Ourselves Alone'), whose aim was "to establish in Ireland's capital a national legislature endowed with the moral authority of the Irish nation". At first things did not go well for the party. It contested the 1908 North Leitrim by-election, where it secured 27% of the vote; but thereafter, support and membership fell; and attendance was poor at the 1910 party conference. In 1914, many Sinn Féin members, including Griffith, joined the Irish Volunteers, to fight for Britain; but many Sinn Féin members took part in the Easter Rising of 1916 and, after this was crushed and its leaders executed, large numbers of republicans came together under Sinn Féin's leadership. At the 1917 party conference, the party committed itself for the first time to the establishment of an Irish Republic.

What broke the mould of Irish politics was that in the 1918 general election, *Sinn Féin* won 73 of Ireland's 105 seats; and the party proceeded to implement its pledge to go it alone. In 1919, its MPs assembled in Dublin and proclaimed themselves *Dáil Éireann*, the parliament of Ireland; and the party supported the Irish Republican Army during the War of Independence which followed. The result of the War was the signing of a highly controversial Treaty, providing for the partition of Ireland, and the creation of a 26 county Free State, which would still form part of

the British Empire. A bitter civil war ensued, between pro- and anti-treaty forces within the Irish Republican Army. The Free State was established in 1922, but this was not the Republic which many in *Sinn Féin* and the IRA had fought and died for. In 1937 de Valera drafted a new constitution, which was passed by a referendum. This put an end to dominion status in practice, though Ireland was not formally declared a republic until 1948.

Those who are only familiar with English history, or who seek to question the relevance of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, would do well to read the preamble to the Irish Declaration of Independence of 1919:

> Whereas the Irish people is by right a free people: and whereas for 700 years the Irish people has repeatedly protested in arms against foreign usurpation…

CONCLUSION

Contrary to what the Prime Minister and other politicians repeatedly assert, the majority of the British people did not vote for Brexit. What happened was that a majority of the English and Welsh peoples voted for it, and a majority of the Scots and Northern Irish (and Londoners) voted to remain, while the Irish in the Republic were not even given a say. The figures were: England - 53.4% for Leave, 46.6% for Remain; Wales - 52.5% for Leave, 47.5% for Remain; Scotland - 62% for Remain, 38% for Leave; Northern Ireland - 55.8% for Remain, 44.2% for Leave. Another way of looking at this is that 15.1 million of the 17.4 million votes for Leave were cast in England.

Many of those who voted to leave were members of the 'older generation', like me. They were brought up to believe in a certain version of British, or rather English, history, which has been shown by professional historians to be largely composed of myth. This told them that England had enjoyed an exceptional history and was destined to form the core of a singe British nation; but the world is no longer what it was in 1900, when these things seemed self-evident.

When I had nearly finished writing this book, I visited the *Impressionists in London* exhibition at the Tate Britain. This featured the work of several French artists who lived in London between 1870 and 1900, having taken refuge there as a result of the destruction of Paris by the Franco-Prussian War and the violence which the authorities used to suppress the revolutionary Paris Commune. Between them they painted the portrait of a great capital city, which was also the beating heart of a worldwide Empire. They clearly regarded London as a haven, a place where the upper and middle and classes could enjoy a life of unprecedented prosperity and leisure, and where the working classes at least enjoyed freedom of speech and constitutional government. There was clearly no place like it in Europe, at the time.

Much has changed since. The British Empire is no more; and the British Constitution (which Walter Bagehot so typically described in 1867 as *The English Constitution*) has been radically altered by the reform of the House of Lords, the advent of full democracy, the devolution settlements of 1997, and the novel use of referenda. Yet many of us cling to the past, or see it through rose-tinted spectacles, as the popularity of *Downton Abbey* seems to have shown.

It is widely agreed that the result of the EU referendum of 2016 owed much to the voters' sense of identity; and in my view this was greatly influenced by the notions about our history which people of my generation imbibed with our mother's

milk. Many of these ultimately derive from Miss Marshall's book, which was so influential when grandparents and parents were young.

I started this book with a dream and will finish with a real experience. Some days after the announcement that the UK had voted for Brexit, I was queuing in the Post Office. The Yorkshireman in front of me asked

'When will we gerrus old passports back, nah that we're aht?'

The clerk replied

'We're not aht yet, I 'spect you'll gerrit back when yer renew yer passpoort.'

I presume the man in front took the same view as Nigel Farage. He wanted his country back; but, which country was it that he had in mind; and which period in time was he trying to get back to?

Throughout English history, we have told stories of the fight for liberty of one kind or another, and we have admired leaders who led the struggle for freedom, from Alfred the Great to Hereward the Wake, from the peasants involved in the Peasants' Revolt to the russet-coated captains of the New Model Army and from Elizabeth I to Winston Churchill; but we English have perhaps overlooked the importance of Llewelyn the Great, Owain Lawgoch and Owain Glyndwr in Wales, of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce in Scotland, and of countless martyrs who died in the cause of freedom in Ireland. Moreover, there is a really big question, as to whether the metaphor of the struggle for freedom is appropriate in the context of Brexit.

The E.U. is not a state, let alone a superstate. Yet, when David Cameron tried to negotiate a new deal with the Europeans in the Spring of 2016, he said that he was 'battling for Britain'. It was entirely inappropriate for him to use this phrase, just as it was wrong of Philip Hammond to refer more recently to 'the enemy'. The member states of the European Union are our friends, allies and closest trading partners. We say that we want to co-operate with them, and we certainly have no intention of fighting them. Why then do we – or rather, the English - use language which suggests otherwise? In my view, it is because we have an inflated view of our own importance, based on a traditional view of the history of these Islands which bears little resemblance to current reality.

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