A SPLENDID ISOLATION

A Short History of

English Nationalism

Stephen Cooper

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).

The story of the English Island-fortress and its progress towards nationhood is a stirring one. But that does not always make it good history.

Malcolm Vale (in *The Ancient Enemy*, 2007).

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INTRODUCTION

Two themes ran through conventional English historiography when I was young. The first was that England was coterminous with Britain. The second is that 'we' (that is the English, or British) were the best at everything (or the things that mattered) and that we had been uniquely fortunate amongst nations. This book is the story of my dawning realisation that each of these was a myth.

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 are, of course, my own.

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CHAPTER ONE
THE ANGLO-SAXONS

Most English people know very little about the the first six centuries of our history, and there are many who can name every king and queen since 1066, but none before that date. Yet the Norman Conquest, though a landmark, does not represent the start of English history, though it could be said to have been a new beginning. Yet the Anglo-Saxons, who came across the North Sea and settled in the East and the South of our country, probably started to arrive in numbers after 410 C.E., when the Roman legions decided to abandon the province of *Britannia* to its fate; and in many respects, they were as English as you or me. Genetic science has shown that many of us are directly descended from them; they spoke a Germanic language which was clearly the ancestor of modern English; and they probably frequented the pub, that quintessentially English institution, more often than was good for them.

Popular ignorance about the Anglo-Saxons, to be fair, is to a large extent due to the obscurity surrounding the first two centuries of their history in this Island, between 400 and 600 - the period which the late Professor James Campbell (1935-2016) called 'the lost centuries'; but those who like a historical conundrum, or debate, will find that the paucity of evidence about the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons does not mean that there is any shortage of ideas.

The Anglo-Saxon Settlement

There are really only two home-grown literary sources for the earliest period of English history. These are the British monk Gildas (thought to have lived in the mid 6th century), and the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede (who wrote in the early 8th century). Accordingly, it is only Gildas who was truly a contemporary writer; but Bede's account is generally recognised as being of superior quality, and he did bring his account down to his own day. We therefore know that the Anglo-Saxon conquest of what is now England (if it was truly a conquest!) was not accomplished in a year (as the Norman Conquest was) or even in a few decades (like the Roman). It took centuries. Another important feature is that the Anglo-Saxons created numerous petty kingdoms, and a united English kingdom did not emerge for some 400 years.

But is it right to call it a conquest? At one time, most historians portrayed the Anglo-Saxon settlement in terms of the catastrophe they read about in Gildas. His *Liber Querulus De Excidio Britannia* ('A Book of Complaints about the Destruction of Britain') is a dismal tale, of how the Romano-British population has been punished

by God for its sins. Britain first suffered all the evils of bad government, following the departure of the Roman legions. The Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* is equally catastrophic. Bede starts with the Romans, and was in no doubt about the benefits which their civilisation had conferred on Britain. His narrative tells us that, after the departure of the legions, the Roman Province of *Britannia* was attacked by Picts (from Scotland) and Scots (from Ireland), so that the inhabitants had to appeal to the Romans for protection. Next he tells us about the building of the Antonine and Hadrianic Walls; and he refers to what we call the forts of the Saxon shore as 'towers on the sea-coast to the southward.' The history is confused and the dates are hopelessly wrong; but there is no doubt as to the nature and scale of the catastrophe. Gildas tells us that

> The fire of vengeance, justly kindled by former crimes, spread from sea to sea, fed by the hands of our foes in the east, and did not cease, until, destroying the neighbouring towns and lands, it reached the other side of the island, and dipped its red and savage tongue in the western ocean

Bede's account of the first Anglo-Saxons is a classic text

> Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany - Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, and those also in the province of the West-Saxons who to this day called Jutes, seated opposite to the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is, the country which is now called Old Saxony, came the East-Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West-Saxons. From the Angles, that is, the country which is called Anglia, and which is said, from that time, to remain desert to this day, between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, are descended the East-Angles, the Midland-Angles, Mercians, all the race of the Northumbrians, that is, of those nations that dwell on the north side of the river Humber, and the other nations of the English.

This list of the Germanic tribes who came to Roman Britain in the 5th century has been expanded (by Campbell and others) so as to include Frisians, Franks and even Danes; but its essential accuracy is not in doubt. Nor is the fact that there was little difference, racially or linguistically between the three main groups, so that even the early writers usually refer to them as being the same people (though the Welsh and the Scots still call us 'Saxons', which is 'Sais' in Welsh and 'Sassenachs' in English).

At the same time, the German immigrants did not form into a confederation, as the Franks did in Gaul, and the Visigoths did in Spain. There were numerous communities of settlers in the eastern and central parts of Britain, which gradually coalesced into the so-called 'Heptarchy'of kingdoms known as Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria; but the term obscures the fact that

there was no formal link between these seven, and there were smaller kingdoms or principalities which lasted for decades if not centuries.

Despite the complexity of their political arrangements, the growth of Roman Catholic Christianity in England was a strong unifying force, from the time of St Augustine's mission to Kent in 597 C.E.; and, from the beginning, the Roman Church directed its message at one people, known as 'Angli' in Latin, or 'Angelkynn' or 'Englisc' in the vernacular. Likewise, when the Venerable Bede, who died in 735 C.E., wrote the first history of England, he regarded the Angles and Saxons as barely distinguishable.

Bede goes on to tell us that, following the first invasions, there was an interlude (of around 50 years?) when the Britons fought back. Perhaps this was the 'Arthurian moment', so familiar from later stories, though Bede does not mention Arthur. At any rate, the interlude was followed by further Anglo-Saxon settlement, and further destruction, which permanently poisoned relations between Briton and Saxon, but never extended to what we now call Wales or the Highlands of Scotland.

Bede could not know everything; but he was well-informed and well-read; and, although we should not take him literally, we should take him seriously. He tells us that the Anglo-Saxons brought warfare and destruction wherever they went, and he makes no apology for it. In his view (as in Gildas's, strange to say) the Britons deserved what they got because they were a sinful nation, who did not even try to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. Bede relates that:

> Among other most wicked actions, not to be expressed, which their own historian, Gildas, mournfully takes notice of, they added this - that [the British] never preached the [Christian] faith to the Saxons, or English, who dwelt amongst them.

Victorian and early 20th century historians adopted Bede's narrative wholesale. More recently, Campbell wrote, in less lurid terms

> By the late 6th century the eastern two-thirds of what later became England were in the hands of dynasties of German origin, and to a considerable extent settled by [pagan] German peoples. This is an indication that what happened in eastern Britain was in some sense catastrophic.

On the other hand, Herbert Finberg (1900-1974) thought it was fundamentally improbable that a relatively few Anglo-Saxon settlers could have driven out a large indigenous population of Romano-Britons within a short period of time; and he was especially critical of the idea that an Anglo-Saxon invasion could have involved a mass migration of free peasants, especially when the immigrants came by boat; Eric John (1922-2000) agreed; and the Welsh Nationalist MP Gwynfor Evans also argued for continuity rather than catastrophe on somewhat different grounds, in his *Land of My Fathers* (1974). The most extreme advocate of continuity, however, has to be

Susan Oosthuizen, whose *The Emergence of the English* (Arc Humanities Press, 2019) argues that 'the origins of the English should be sought among late Romano-British communities, evolving, adapting and innovating' rather than in any Anglo-Saxon conquest. To my way of thinking, this seems to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, with a rather large splash.

The advocates of continuity, rather than catastrophe, argue that the settlers arriving from Germany in the 5th century were probably a warrior elite, who nonetheless became dominant in the course of time, by means of conquest, but also by through processes of compromise, co-operation, and 'acculturation' between Briton and Anglo-Saxon. To which one might raise two obvious objections. The first is made simply on the grounds of probability. How likely is it that the Anglo-Saxons, who were initially all pagans, imbued with a warrior culture so excitingly on display in the poem *Beowulf,* and in the goods and artefacts found at Sutton Hoo, would wish or be able to reach an accommodation with the inhabitants of sub-Roman Britain, who were nearly all Christians, with vivid memories of a civilised way of life?

The second objection to the idea of continuity in the Dark Ages is based on the lack of evidence. If modern scholars are right in arguing for compromise between invader and invader, we might have expected to hear at least echoes of these processes in the works of Gildas and Bede; but there are none; and likewise there are no other literary or documentary sources which mention them or point to them. The evidence which Ossthuizen relies on largely concerns the survival of Celtic and Romano-British field-systems; but I fail to see what is remarkable about the idea that the German invaders would take over an existing system of agriculture which worked to their advantage.

What contribution has modern archaeology and genetic science made to the debate, as to whether the lost centuries were characterised by continuity or catastrophe?

Despite the vast increase in the quantity of archaeological finds in the last fifty years (especially since the advent of the detectorists), the results are unfortunately confusing; and, while archaeologists (with the notable exception of Bryan Ward-Perkins) tend to be advocates of continuity, Campbell pointed out that 'there is almost a total absence of archaeological traces of the Britons'. This pointed in favour of catastrophe; and recently, in *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (2018) Professor John Blair has told us that he remains 'as impressed as before by the documentary elusiveness of royal residential or assembly sites within Roman walls between 650 and 850, when our texts should mention them if they had been at all common'. On the other hand, Professor Alice Roberts recently argued strongly for contuity in her TV programme *King Arthur's Britain: The Truth Unearthed*), broadcast on BBC 2 on 22 April 2020. She based the programme on withering criticism of the sparse literary sources; but also relied heavily on new archaeological evidence (and especially on a massive geophysical survey) which had failed to find any evidence at all - in the

form of mass graves, for example - of an Anglo-Saxon invasion. But I was always taught that 'the absence of evidence is not evidence.'

I am also suspicious of the archaeological evidence, in so far as it is deployed in favour of the continuity thesis, because I seem to remember that, a generation ago, it used to be argued that the Vikings too were in the main peaceful traders and settlers, which manifestly does not fit with the contemporary view either. So I have wondered if there is not some alternative view of the archaeology in relation to the barbarian invasions of the Western Roman Empire in general; and there is: it can be found in Bryan Ward-Perkins's *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation* (Oxford University Press, 2005). I cannot improve on that. His conclusion was that the Roman Empire did indeed fall, not because it declined, but because it was killed off: see also Arthur Ferrill *The Fall of the Roman Empire: the Military Explanation* (1986). As for the (relatively recent) examination of the DNA, scientists disagree about the interpretation of the data; and it is difficult for the layman to decide who is right. The science does seem to tell us that the Anglo-Saxons settled in England in considerable numbers in historic times, in contrast to the Romans and Normans, and apparently in contrast even with the Danish and Norwegian Vikings; but it does not tell us how or when. Moreover, it does not explain whether the Anglo-Saxon migration was a mass phenomenon, or simply involved a warrior élite which multiplied rapidly after arrival in the new territory, by fair means or foul.

Finally, though I have to admit being influenced by a holiday in Brittany in 2018. In ancient times, when Brittany was part of the Roman Empire, it was called Armorica; but its modern name means 'Little Britain', because the Celtic population was strongly reinforced by immigrants, in the lost centuries, from Wales and above all Devon and Cornwall, who brought their language, as well as many of their traditions and customs with them. It has been estimated that they anything between 30,000 and 50,000 people were involved, who must all have arrived in small boats.

Were these Britons fleeing the Anglo-Saxons, who were making similarly hazardous journeys across the North Sea at around the same time? This was certainly the traditional explanation given by historians when I was young. Nowadays we are told that there were in fact two waves of migration, the first of which was the result of Irish attacks on sub-Roman Britain, and the second of which was a combination of sponsorship by the sub-Roman authorities in Gaul (as a means of bolstering their defences against Frankish aggression), and a spontaneous reaction to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain. The details remain obscure; but, amongst the refugees who fled to Brittany was Gildas - the same who described the destruction of [Great] Britain by barbarian invaders in such graphic terms.

Gildas is nowadays treated with a good deal of scepticism; but he was after all an eye-witness; and perhaps the most significant fact about his life is perhaps the one that many people ignore, which is that, faced with the advent of the Anglo-Saxons, he chose to emigrate to Brittany, where he gave his name to St Gildas de Rhuys, now a small seaside resort on the south side of the Gulf of Morbihan. There, he founded a monastery and was made a Saint. He did not spill much ink on the

great migration in his book but he does refer to it, in terms which clearly link it to his feelings about the Anglo-Saxon conquest of his native land

> Some therefore, of the miserable remnant, being taken in the mountains, were murdered in great numbers; others, constrained by famine, came and yielded themselves to be slaves for ever to their foes, running the risk of being instantly slain, which truly was the greatest favour that could be offered them: some others passed beyond the seas.

Why did Gildas and his fellow Britons choose to emigrate, braving all the dangers this involved, and in such numbers, if they really had the choice of staying in their homes and becoming peacefully subsumed into the new Anglo-Saxon order, as the advocates of the 'continuity school' seem to suggest that they could have done?

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, which showed 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 (1922-2000) pointed out, the Danes came to settle, rather than simply as raiders and traders This meant that they took control of the land, and that inevitably meant that the native population was (to a greater or lesser extent) dispossessed, if not murdered.

Alfred is one of only two Kings of England to have been called 'Great' (the other being Canute or Knut, who was Danish); but he only achieved that distinction 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 (Holy Roman Emperor between 800 and 814 C.E.) or Otto the Great (who held the office between 962 and 973). The question is why?

Father John Lingard (1771-1851), who was an historian as well as a Roman Catholic priest, explained that what made Alfred special was that he was not only a great warrior, who preserved 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 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 Catholic, at a time when the only realistic alternative was Nordic paganism. Indeed, in the opinion of E.A.Freeman (1823-1892) 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 of 1905

> [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 three Danish invasions which took place between 865-9 C.E., 870-8 and 892-6. During the first and second of them the Vikings conquered Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia, and attacked Wessex in great numbers 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, all the English kingdoms apart from Wessex 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 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, building of fortified towns, and 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 (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 continental precedent for his law code, and his love of Latin and Latin works on Christian

philosophy, are 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 Alfred and Arthur rolled into one.

The last century of the Old English state[1]

By re-conquering the parts of the country occupied by the Vikings, the Kings of Wessex managed to create a new Christian Kingdom of all England, including London; and Alfred's distinctive ideas about government spread throughout his kingdom. The Roman version of Christianity was central; and under St Dunstan (909-988) the English Church saw a notable revival. Many of the churches and monasteries which had been destroyed by the Vikings were re-built. But it is difficult to be as positive about the last century of the Anglo-Saxon state - say between 975 and 1066 – as it is about the ages of Bede or Alfred, because in the last years of the 10th century the Vikings returned to England in greater numbers than before, sometimes backed by the monarchs of Denmark and Norway, and almost destroyed it.

The problem was particularly bad during the reign of Aethelred 'the Unready' (978-1013 and 1014-16). In 991, at the Battle of Maldon, the Vikings inflicted a notable defeat on local Anglo-Saxon forces; but there was a more general failure to defend the country. The Alfredian system of defence in depth, based on fortified burghs and a standing army and navy broke down. Demoralisation was widespread. During the worst period of renewed raiding there were disgraceful episodes – occasions when Vikings landed and led away slaves in droves, or engaged in gang rape, while local men helplessly on, entirely unable to stop them. When the English did fight back, it was in disorganised and indiscriminate fashion: the St Brice's Day massacre of 1002 saw large numbers of Danes killed on the orders of Aethelred, regardless of whether they had been involved in the recent violence; but the usual response was to buy the Vikings off. 'Danegelds' were levied in 994, 1002, 1007 and 1012; and a total of some £250,000 was paid to the Vikings over a period of 50 years or so.

Eventually the renewed Scandinavian onslaught resulted in the conquest of the kingdom of England in 1013, when Sweyn, King of Denmark and Norway, invaded and received the submission of Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex in turn. However, the reign of his successor King Cnut (1016-1035) is normally portrayed as relatively benign. In particular this was the view of Sir Frank Stenton, author of the

[1] See now Stephen Baxter's brilliant summary of these issues in *1066 and Government, Perspective*, ed. D. Bates and E. Impey (Leeds, 2018), pp. 133–55

magisterial *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943). He recognised the decline of the old English monarchy but thought that 'scholars survived the bad times'; that there was 'no sign that Cnut aimed at founding a northern empire; and that 'Cnut stressed the continuity of his government with that of his predecessors'. Finally, 'despite obvious weaknesses the idea of political unity was accepted everywhere [in England] in the last generation of the Old English state'.

But nothing is what it seems in late Anglo-Saxon England. Cnut, though King of England and a Christian, must have seemed very Danish at the time. Eric John wrote of 'defeat and humiliation' in 1016; and, once established as King of England, Cnut silenced dissent by assassination and purges. He was beholden to his Danish followers – and rewarded them with earldoms (though he appointed more Englishmen to high office at the end of his reign). He also used the Danegeld to pay for his wars in Scandinavia and recruited Englishmen into his armies for the wars which he prosecuted there. This looks like a kind of Danish imperialism, despite Stenton's protestations to the contrary.

Cnut is often said to have protected England from further Viking attack; but there were renewed Viking raids on the kingdom in 1048 while, as a result of Cnut's conquest of Norway there was a new threat from that direction too. Both Magnus 'the Good' of Norway (1035-47) and his son Harald Hardrada had designs on England. In the Earldom of Northumbria, many people of Scandinavian descent in Yorkshire were ruled by a Danish Earl (Siward), who managed to reduce the area North of the Tees to his rule.

The famed unity of the Old English kingdom was put in jeopardy in this period. Although Cnut and his sons ruled the kingdom from 1016 to 1042, and were succeeded by Edward the Confessor (son of Aethelred the Unready) between 1035 and 1066, there were several contenders for power in the mid-11th century, especially once it became clear that Edward would not produce an heir. These included several Scandinavian candidates; the descendants of Edmund Ironside of Wessex, who had occupied the throne briefly in 1016; Duke William of Normandy; and the house of Godwine, Earl of Wessex, an 'overmighty subject' who, at one point controlled every part of England except Mercia, while his appointees controlled both archdioceses, and his daughter Edith was Edward the Confessor's Queen.

One might say that the years preceding 1066 witnessed a War of the English Succession, though the term has never been used by historians. War almost broke out in 1051-2, when Edward first sent Godwine into exile and then felt obliged to bring him bak. It almost erupted again in 1065, when there was a rebellion in the North of England which succeeded in driving Harold Godwinson's brother (Earl Tostig) into exile. The Northerners invaded the South and Harold aligned himself with them, against his own brother. One can understand why some historians give credit to the Normans for rescuing England once and for all from the grip of the Vikings and the curse of internal anarchy.

The debate about the Norman Conquest

If there is a debate about the nature of the Anglo-Saxon settlement in the lost centuries, there is also an equally fierce discussion to be had about the nature of the Norman Conquest of 1066. 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?

This time, there is no shortage of reliable contemporary narrative. The question has troubled the English (if not the Celtic nations) for centuries; and 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 (in the writer's view) 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*.

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 (the man he had overthrown in 1066) had sworn fealty to William during a visit to the latter's Duchy of 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*. In Orderic's view, William *maintained his excellent reputation to the end*

There was even a view that the Anglo-Saxon nobility 'had it coming' in 1066. 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 with it a genuine religious revival. He praised the Normans 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. The Anglo-Saxons' priests had been ignorant, their monks had consistently disregarded the Benedictine Rule, and the whole race had given itself up to *luxury and wantonness*. They had even resorted to widescale robbery, and sold pregnant servants into prostitution and slavery. Above all, *drinking parties had been a universal English custom, in which they passed entire days and nights*. So, in William of Malmesbury's view, it was binge-drinking which had led to the calamitous and ignominious defeat of the Anglo-Saxon army at Hastings.

Yet there have always been those who thought that the Normans had nothing to teach the Anglo-Saxons. In the 20th century James Campbell and Patrick Wormald both thought 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.

In the years which followed the Conquest, William I spent much of his time putting down rebellions, which he did with great ruthlessness. Perhaps he had to. The Normans and their allies were after all 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 putting down numerous rebellions. A certain degree of ruthlessness was therefore to be expected from the Conqueror, but the eventual outcome was the almost complete replacement of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy by Norman lords.

The Conquest itself made William both rich and powerful – far more than he had been before. Whatever it lacked in strength, the Old English state was certainly 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. 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). 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.

In the end, it is a question of perspective; but there seems little doubt that, for a time, the Anglo-Saxons saw the Norman Conquest as a *Nakba* – the term used by the Palestinians about 1948, when 700,000 of them were driven from their homes. The numbers of Englishmen who were killed, expropriated, or driven into exile, during the reign of William the Conqueror was no doubt far smaller; but it was nonetheless substantial. What would an Anglo-Saxon, living in exile in New York in the Crimea 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?

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 (1909-1981) 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 here, after all, for the Englishman's comfort.

CHAPTER TWO
AT THE HEART OF EUROPE

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At the Heart of Europe?

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 European Economic Community

> 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 addressing some remarks to Sir Edward Heath's, who had been Prime Minister when Britain joined the EEC:

> 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.

Not everyone had accepted that the UK belonged at the heart of Europe in the 1960s. In rejecting the UK's application for membership of the EEC in 1963 the French President, General de Gaulle, had 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 might argue, 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 EEC at the same time as the UK; but also that he spoke about England as if she was incapable of change.

England is not an island, and she has not always been '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, and the Netherlands. These six were all part of Charlemagne's Empire in the Early Middle Ages and they eventually became the founding members of the EEC; but this had not always been so. 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, the English missionary known to history as 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 in 800, or the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German nation' created by Otto the Great in 951; but this was not because the English subscribed to different values, but rather because we were, for a time, dragged against our will into the Scandinavian world. Everyone knows about the Norman Conquest of 1066; but few know about the conquests of Guthrum, Olaf Guthfrithson, Eric Bloodaxe and Cnut the Great, of various parts of the Anglo-Saxon polity. The effect of these on English history and society was greater than we have traditionally seen it, and profound. In truth, we should speak of the late Anglo-Saxon kingdom as an Anglo-Scandinavian kingdom.

All this changed again in 1066. Normandy was not at all insular, nor was Anjou, while, for at least two centuries after the Conquest of 1066, English attentions were diverted to France at the political, military and religious levels. The French kingdom was at the time not only the largest, most populous and richest in Western Europe, she was the eldest 'daughter' of the Roman Church and the most influential country in Western Europe, possibly in Europe as a whole. The Anglo-Norman and Angevin kings who ruled England a large part of France in the 11th and 12th centuries wished to pursue their ambitions there because they really did want 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 this 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 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 repeated the question asked by Thomas Carlyle 100 years previously: 'Without the Normans, what would England have been?' And he gave the same answer - that the English would have remained

> 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 the fans of Anglo-Saxon England or with Thomas Carlyle and R. Allen Brown, it is undoubtedly true that the Normans re-orientated English 'foreign policy' after 1066. Whereas England in the 9th, 10th and early 11th centuries had been principally 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. This remained the case for the Anglo-Norman nobility until 1204, when those who owned fiefs on both sides of the Channel lost their possessions in Normandy, unless they chose to go into exile; and it remained the case 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 did not even make serious inroads in 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 what used to be called 'the High Middle Ages' the twin pillars of European civilisation were the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire (which, at its height, included large parts of Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and France). Neither the French nor the English kingdoms ever formed part of that Empire; but Richard of Cornwall (the 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 Universities, founded in Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge in the 12th and 13th centuries. Englishmen were also significant figures in the explosion of new monastic orders in the 12th century and the spectacular growth of the two orders of Friars in the 13th. These were pan-European movements; but, for example, the *Carta Caritatis*, which was the foundation document of 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 intellectuals of Western Europe, 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.

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 one of those rare times when England and France genuinely sought to make peace. By the Treaty of Paris of 1259 Henry III acknowledged the loss of Maine, Anjou and Poitou, as well as the Duchy of Normandy (apart from the Channel Islands), while Louis IX agreed that Henry be

recognised as Duke of Aquitaine. Modern historians seem to think that this Treaty contained the seeds of future wars; but secured peace for a generation; and Louis IX was so respected in England that he was asked to arbitrate in a dispute between Henry III and his Barons in 1264.

But, if the court was cosmopolitan, there is a wealth of evidence that the English people as a whole were not. Prestwich attributed this (in part) to the loss of Normandy to the French kingdom in 1204, which made English politics more insular. On the other hand, Henry III had foreign favourites and relatives who became a focus for English antipathy (and 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 encountered many travellers, nevertheless disliked all 'aliens' (foreigners), but especially Poitevins and Savoyards, papal appointees, foreign mercenaries and Italian bankers. He repeatedly condemned 'the insatable greed of the Roman *curia*'; and (regrettably but inescapably) 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 Paris levelled the same prejudiced charge against the Flemings and the Cahorsins (who came from Cahors in South-West France); and it was not only the Continentals who were the victims of English prejudice. Throughout the Middle Ages, the seas surrounding the British coastline, so far from providing a protective girdle for the Kingdom of England, in fact provided a comparatively fast (if dangerous) route for foreign powers to get in touch with the hostile peoples who also surrounded the kingdom: Irish, Welsh and Scots alike. It is to them we must now turn.

Ireland

The Normans' mastery of warfare enabled them to expand, not just in Britain but in the South of Italy and Sicily, and (as a result of the First and Second Crusades) in the Holy Land as well. Then, in 1170, the Anglo-Norman barons, led by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (known as 'Strongbow') invaded Ireland, while Henry II, who was Dukeof Aquitaine as well as King of England and spoke French, as did his barons, 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.

In 1905 H.E.Marshall provided a simple reasons for this invasion for children, though it would have satisfied many British adults too

> 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, Henry II invaded Ireland to take back control from the Barons who had gone 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 one and only English Pope, Adrian IV. The bull, known as *Laudabiliter*, argued that the Irish were uncivilised; but the argument was put more fully by the monk Gerald of Wales in his books about Ireland. Gerald pulled no punches. He claimed 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 that the King of Ulster was inaugurated only after ritual sexual intercourse with a horse, which he then ate. Further the Irish were

> 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 'fake news'. In particular, it was hardly fair to condemn the Irish for being poor Christians by Roman standards when St Patrick's mission to Ireland pre-dated St Augustine's to England (in 597) by over 100 years; and even Gerald of Wales himself concluded, after examining 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 when he wrote that the Irish did not engage in agriculture.

Perhaps the best response to Gerald's strident condemnation 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 of 1919-21. O'Hegarty's starting point was that there had long been an Irish nation, long before Strongbow's invasion; and that this nation had its own language, religious practices and forms of government, which differed from those in England and France (which had centraliseed institutions). At the same time O'Hegarty delighted in pointing out that there was time when the Irish had been more doughty fighters than the English. Had they not, under Brian Boru, been able to decisively defeat the Scandinavians in 1014, around the time that Anglo-Saxon England had been overrun by Cnut 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 the English. 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 was involved with her Continental neighbours to an unprecedented degree; but it was also a time when the English monarchs attempted to bring the Island of Britain under direct English control for the first time. 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'. However, it was Edward I (r. 1272-1307) who completed the conquest, when he surrounded Snowdonia with those 'state of the art' castles which are so familiar to the tourist, at Conway, Caernarvon, Harlech, and Beaumaris on Anglesey. H.E.M.Marshall told the tale, as the English liked to hear it told in the early 20th century

> 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.

Gwynfor Evans's stirring and passionate history of his native land rejects this childish view entirely. For Evans, Wales was a nation even in Anglo-Saxon times. Echoing O'Hegarty's view of Ireland, Evans tells us how the Welsh had no centralised monarchy but developed a federation of principalities, which was capable of posing a threat to the English, even when the Midlands were united under Offa, King of Mercia, between 757 and 796. What else explains 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 our much vaunted Old English kingdom went down to defeat in 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), in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, who gave medieval Britain its most celebrated hero, in the shape of King Arthur,

Geoffrey of Monmouth 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' as a classic of European literature, and was to be found in all the monastic libraries of Latin Christendom (which roughly corresponded to the European Common Market). This was a remarkable achievement given, that the plot and the main characters were invented, though Geoffrey's book was intended to be a history. In the introduction, he tells us that his stories were largely based on an even older 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 differed from Wales and Ireland in that she had a monarchy, older even than the one which emerged in England in the 9th century; and surprisingly, relations between England and Scotland were relatively peaceful until the reign of Edward I of England, though Norman barons and knights did settle in the Scottish Lowlands after 1066. Edward I's armies almost succeeded in conquering the northern kingdom; but the Scots fought and won no less than two Wars of Independence between 1296 and 1357, before the English agree final terms for what we might call 'Scotexit'. This 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 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 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 (the one who had his heart torn out, quite literally), nor of Robert the Bruce; but the lasting importance of the Scottish victory at Bannockburn over Edward II in 1314 cannot be ignored. It is Bannockburn which is celebrated in what has now 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 recognised 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 King John to agree to Magna Carta in 1215. In the modern world, Wallace has become more famous than Bruce, because of the worldwide impression made by Mel Gibson's performance in *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 - those who wrote 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 revolutions are usually powered by a sense of common identity and solidarity in the face of oppression, rather than by economic factors.

> 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 for this 'freedom clause', but for an earlier sentence which threatened to depose Robert the Bruce if he failed to live up to expectations! Why? "Because here (in Magnusson's view) we have the idea of 'elective kingship', of the contractual theory of monarchy". The Scots were making it clear to Bruce, who had certainly not been an entirely consistent 'democrat' in the modern sense, that he was answerable to his subjects. This is the first time that such a threat appears, in any country we know of.

CHAPTER THREE
MERRIE ENGLAND

The idea of a 'Golden Age', set long ago in the past, is at least as old as the Greeks: it is mentioned by Hesiod (c.750-c.650 BCE), and Plato (c.423-c.347 BCE). It refers to a period when mankind supposedly enjoyed peace and prosperity, and there was harmony between nations and classes. It may be regarded as the Classical equivalent of the Garden of Eden. The rebels who took part in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 are said to have asked

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?

The myth was not always associated with revolution or with a call for social change, though modern scholars like to make a connection.

The Norman Yoke

The majority of Anglo-Saxons could not go abroad to escape the Normans, but not all those who stayed accepted Norman rule. There were many who felt a lasting sense of resentment (as well as a good number who actively resisted. In the early 12th century, the Anglo-Norman monk Ordericus Vitalis describes the English as 'groaning aloud' for their lost liberty, and plotting to regain it. Later, the idea of 'the Norman Yoke' was formulated: we find it in the works of the Gilbertine monk Robert Mannyng, who was born around 1275. He tells his countrymen that they are living in a vassal state, created by William the Conqueror, from whose lords the upper class claims descent; but at the same time, he fears conquest by the contemporary French, far more. His lament includes criticism of both these foreign races. 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 the

Conqueror had usurped the throne of England, harried the North 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 later. This is very different from the version of history we were give when I was young. In those days, we were assured that the Normans had merged with the Anglo-Saxons within 100 years of the Conquest; but Robert tells us that in his day are Normans still have the whip-hand:

> *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 of the Norman Yoke was developed by Andrew Horn, in an early 14th century textbook for lawyers, *The Mirror of Justices*, which was widely copied and circulated in manuscript in Queen Elizabeth I's time. Further, William Tyndale (1494-1536), who translated the Bible into English, portrayed the Norman Yoke as one of the origins of English Protestantism, because the Pope had supported the Conqueror in 1066, and promised 'forgiveness of sins to all in the invading army.'

The myth achieved wide circulation in the writings of Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634), one of the outstanding lawyers of his day and a champion of the English common law - whose origins he traced back to Anglo-Saxon times. In his view the Norman Conquest had unduly strengthened the power of the monarchy.

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 from all our shoulders became a rallying cry, at first for the 'respectable classes' of a radical persuasion, and ultimately for the Levellers and Diggers (who advocated a primitive form of communism).

The Yoke remained a potent source of myth, even in modern times. In Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820) and Charles Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* (1865) Anglo-Saxon England was portrayed as a paradise, where we were all happy, until the Normans came along and spoiled the party; but, before we accept this as an accurate representation, we would do well to consider the picture of Anglo-Saxon society painted by the historian Eric John (1922-2000):

> 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.

On this view of the matter, the Norman Yoke was an idea rather than a newly-imposed 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, when dreaming of the Golden Age. 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 than after it - enjoyed a revival in the late 19th century,

The first Regius Professors of Modern History in this country were inclined to take the 'Germanist' view that our modern freedoms were born in the German woods of the 1st century C.E. Indeed Edward Augustus Freeman (1823-1892) 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' to Germany of Alsace-Lorraine, during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, rather than to its conquest by Germany, as all Frenchmen regarded it.

Bishop Stubbs (1825-1901) praised the customs and laws which he thought we had inherited from our Anglo-Saxon forebears, and had 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)

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, by a new generation of historians who agreed with John that late Anglo-Saxon England was as 'feudal' as Normandy, though it may have lacked the formal institution of knight's service.

Robin Hood

Was Robin Hood a real person? 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 *Dictionary of National Biography* devoted exclusively to proving that its subject never existed'; but, like that other non-existent hero King Arthur, there was an extensive literature devoted to him, even in medieval times.

Robin first appears in William Langland's late 14th century poem *Piers the Plowman*, when Sloth the 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 explained how the tales of Robin Hood were added to over the centuries:

> By the early 15th century, references have become 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 Hode,* 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. My little sister thrilled to Richard Greene's portrayal of him (and I to Patricia Driscoll's Maid Marian) in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, which ran between 1955 and 1959, mostly because it had a 'catchy' theme tune, subsequently parodied by the Monty Python team in the late 1960s. By then, Robin had acquired fierce partisans in many parts of the country, including Nottingham and Sherwood Forest, but also 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 new airport after Robin Hood.

There came a time when historians began to examine the social significance of the ballads concerning Robin's 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 *The Origins of Robin Hood* (P&P No 14, 1958) Hilton argued that there was a continuity between the ballads and the agenda of some of the rebels involved in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381; and this idea was supported by a young Maurice Keen (1933-2012) in *Robin Hood - Peasant or Gentleman?* (P&P No. 19, 1961), though it was attacked by Holt in *The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood* (P&P No. 18, 1960) and *Robin Hood: some comments* (P&P No 19, 1961). Holt pointed out that rural and peasant issues are nowhere to be found in the texts, and proposed that Hilton's supposedly dissident audience was in fact composed of members of the lower gentry, their hangers-on and higher servants. This was a thesis which Keen eventually came to accept (see the revised edition of his book *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); but Hilton never did.

There were other sources, apart from the ballads. These included military and legal records, from which one might well deduce that there were several Robin Hoods, not just one. The earliest is a record of the York Assizes in 1226 which mentions a person named Robert Hod, whose goods (worth 32 shillings and 6 pence) were confiscated. As a result, Hod became an outlaw, and in 1227 he was called "Hobbehod"; but there are many other references to men of that name later in the century. Indeed John Maddicott has suggested that "Robin Hood" was a stock alias used by thieves; and we may note, in addition, that there is no sign that any of the accused robbed from the rich to give to the poor.

Andrew Ayton found an archer who was apparently not an outlaw at all:

> 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 standing guard on the Isle of Wight was probably a crack shot, rather than an outlaw; but the problem is that hundreds of tales have been told about Robin Hood over the centuries, and dozen of theories have been advanced as to who he might have been. The only safe conclusion 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. It took various forms but was usually set in the late Middle Ages. In 1552, Dr John Caius, second founder of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, referred to 'the old world when this country was called Merry England.' 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. More recently, M.M.Postan called the `14th century 'the golden age of the English boroughs', Thorold Rogers described the 15th century as 'the golden age of the English labourer', and Joel Rosenthal labelled these two centuries as 'a golden age for the nobility.' In his *Rise and Fall of Merry England* (1994) Ronald Hutton concluded that many festivals had only been developed in late medieval period, rather than being pagan or prehistoric survivals; and that England had ceased to be 'merry' as a result of the Reformation and the Puritan Revolution.

The most typical inhabitant of Merry England was the English yeoman, who occupied a place in society below the gentleman, but well above the landless peasant. According to one dictionary, the yeomen were "persons qualified by possessing free land of 40/- (shillings) annual value, who can serve on juries and vote for a Knight of the Shire"; but this tells us nothing about their legendary place in English history, as the bowmen who humbled the French aristocracy at the battles of Crécy (1346), Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415).

And yet, if the yeomen have become famous, they remain obscure. 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. M.M.Postan concluded that peasant were often missing from medieval court rolls, peasant genealogies and inheritance cases, because they were they had been 'slain in their lord's or the king's service'. The finding that these warriors were of inferior status was apparently confirmed by the fact that the longbow was not a noble weapon. It is certainly true that archers were inferior to the men at arms, let alone the knights, in a medieval army: they were paid less, and the code of chivalry did not apply to them.

But the yeomen 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'. In addition, the muster rolls compiled in 1415 contain several references to 'yeomen of the household' or 'yeoman usher of the household'; and these were clearly men of relatively high status. At the same time, English literature tells us that at least some archers were mounted and must therefore have had the means to support a team of horses and appropriate (if light) armour. Shakespeare's character Henry V (in the eponymous play written almost 200 years after the event)

addresses a yeoman on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, and tells us 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.

The archer had made an appearance in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* at the end of the 14th century, and in Roger Asham's *Toxophilus* of 1545; but modern writers have also waxed lyrical. The historian J.H.Wylie (d. 1914) wrote of the archer's 'swift and unerring skill' and claimed that he 'shot never arrow amiss'. In 1976 the actor Robert Hardy (1925-2017) appeared to think that marksmanship was heritable, despite startling developments in technology:

> 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 may be stirring stuff, but it is not serious history.

The English archers at Agincourt were part of a very effective killing-machine; and one of the principal reasons for their success lay in training, rather than breeding. Specifically, and unlike French crossbowmen, they were trained to rush forward and attack the enemy when they had run out of arrows; and at Agincourt, they used a new type of weapon, according to a French monk of St Denis who wrote that:

> 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.

The English bowmen may also have used the notorious 'kidney' or 'bollock' dagger, whose use need not be elaborated on.

The idea of 'Merrie England' enjoyed a revival in the late 19th century, by which time most of us were living in towns, while retaining a great fondness for the English countryside. According to many writers the rural depopulation which was experienced at this time was a 'great national tragedy'. Ordinary working people were ejected from the soil and condemned to live in urban misery, in great numbers. Romantics, Radicals and some Socialists all agreed that something important had been lost; and in the 1880s, some politicians took up the cry that every family should be provided with 'Three acres and a cow'. 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 were no large cities, no private property, no currency, no police force, no army, no courts or prisons, no divorce and no class system. The people lived in plenty and harmony because they found renewed 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 was ugly, disagreeable, mechanical and injurious to health. The factory districts of Lancashire were dirty, smoky and disgusting and life there was only supportable because of an annual holiday; but, as for 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 a hideous and dirty town?

There were always Liberals and Progressives who thought that the move from the countryside to the town was inevitable; and that 'Merrie England' was a myth – the kind of Golden Age which each generation invents for itself, because '*Fings Ain't What they Used to Be'*. Yet the belief that, once upon a time, there was an England that was happier still persists, despite the fact that there has never been any general agreement as to when this was so. 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 (1837-1883), who wrote several popular books about English history, described an Anglo-Saxon of the 8th century in terms which would have appealed to William Morris, Robert Blatchford and numerous others 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. (Cited in Burrow, *Liberal Descent*)

'Merrie England 'is also the title of a comic opera, first performed in 1902, but set against the background of Elizabethan England. The songs included *The Yeomen of England.* The opera was revived in the 1950s, during the so-called 'Second

Elizabeth Age'; and the yeomen were once again a central feature. The librettist asked the historian's question, though he gave a somewhat romantic answer:

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 sang this song with gusto when I was at school in Liverpool in the late 1950s and early 1960s, though there were very few of us then who had a ruddy tan, unless it had been acquired in the Summer in Cornwall, or – in a very few cases – on the Costa Brava.

The Merchant's Complaint

Medieval England was small, in terms of territory and population, in comparison with her potential enemies and principal trading partners; but the English kingdom was relatively centralised in terms of government, law and taxation, and the ports of London, Dover, and Calais (seized in 1347) were of international significance. As a result, the English had long been able to 'punch above their weight'.

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 his countrymen to oversee the English Channel. He advocated an aggressive foreign and commercial policy, based on seapower, and a more energetic approach to trade. His central message is contained in the first verses of the poem:

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

The background to the *Libelle* was that Henry V and his brother Bedford had conquered the Duchy of Normandy between 1417 and 1419 and had then (in alliance with Burgundy) overrun a large part of Northern France, including Paris itself; but the English position in France was put in jeopardy when there was a large scale

revolt in Normandy in 1435-6, followed by a Peace Treaty between the French and the Burgundians, and the death of the Duke of Bedford. As a result, the Burgundians laid siege to Calais, and the French Dauphin, who had hitherto been regarded as 'the King of Bourges' was crowned in Reims and recovered Paris. These reversals of fortune led to attacks on Picard, Flemish and Dutch merchants by the London mob, which regarded them all as treacherous 'Flemings'.

The author of the *Libelle* developed his argument by reviewing England's main enemies – Spain and Burgundian Flanders. He described their main products and exports and pointed out that their trade was heavily dependant on English markets, and the free use of the English Channel. The tone is not only nationalist, but jingoistic: we have been too soft in the past; we ought to dictate the terms of trade because the Flemings need our raw materials wool to keep the wheels of their industries turning:

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.

After passing swipes at the Bretons and the Scots, the author of the *Libelle* turns his attention to other trading partners - the Portuguese, Icelanders, Hanseatic and other Germans, and Italians. We have been taken advantage of and (in some cases) cheated; but we can take back control, by being more self-confident. We have been a great country in the past (in the time of Henry V and Bedford, Edward III, and even the Anglo-Saxon King Edgar); and we can make England great again.

It is the Italians, and especially the Venetians and Florentines, who most annoy this Englishman, These foreigners do little more than sell us luxury goods which we can well do without – including spices, sweet wines, and even exotic pets:

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.

The Italians also engage in unfair trading practices. The Florentines in particular 'rub our noses in it', for we are made to:

Wipen our nose with our owen sleve.

The full litany of complaints has become familiar in England in recent years. 'They come over here and take our [money/jobs/women].' 'We play by the rules and they don't.' Our merchants should also spend less time going to plays and parties, and more on minding the shop, because "Gestes [plays] and festes [parties] stoppen our policye".

Lastly, the writer of the *Libelle* is worried about the situation in Ireland and in Wales. Ireland is divided etween the Anglo-Irish and the Gaels (or 'wild Irish'); and the poet is very conscious of what historians call the Gaelic Resurgence. 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 recalls also the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr (or 'Owen Glendower' in Wales, and fears a further uprising there. The Irish and the Welsh may even form an alliance; and then we will be surrounded by hostile (and mostly Celtic) nations, in a 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 argument in *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* is flawed. Firstly, the poet is saying that we should 'put England first' when it comes to trade and commerce; but there are no detailed policies. It is simply assumed tht the governent is at fault in not having taken appropriate action already; and the writer also makes the false assumption that trade is a competition, and there are no benefits to be derived from co-operation.

Secondly, if the policy advocated in the *Libelle* is to work at all, England must be able to deliver a powerful punch when necessary, not merely at the conference table, but on the high seas. Yet that assumes that we will 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 Henry's Navy no longer existed. Susan Rose's studies 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.

The Lawyer's Boast

Sir John Fortescue (c.1394 – 1479) was a lawyer, a 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 the book for the instruction of Henry's young son Prince Edward. It is proof that English nationalism was not merely linked with ignorant xenophobia: Fortescue was a highly-educated man who lived in France for several years.

Fortescue explains why in his view the English have the best kind of law and legal system. He argues that the common law made by the judges is very old, and has survived many profound changes:

> 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 several aspects of English legal system with the Roman or 'civil' law which applied in France, and always to England's advantage. So, in criminal trials 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 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. In explaining the merits of trial by jury, he sings a full hymn of praise to his homeland:

> [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.

Fortescue thinks that the reason for the difference between the English and other systems of law is to be found in economic and social conditions. In England, these produce prosperous and intelligent yeomen capable of jury service, whereas in France and other countries, poverty and oppression prevent the emergence of the men required, at least in sufficient numbers.

A word of warning is in order, here. Before we are totally carred away by Sir John's eloquence – and he was after all a barrister, well used to presenting any case in a favourable light - we should remember that his system of law is the same which is illustrated by the events and characters in the Paston Letters (which span almost the whole of the late 15th century); and they, tell a story of widespread injustice. In the East Anglian world which the Pastons inhabited, juries were routinely packed, verdicts did not reflect the evidence, and when it was delivered, justice was often overturned by resort to armed force. War-war frequently triumphed over jaw-jaw, and there were many nobles and gentlemen who were prepared to engage in both these activities.

CHAPTER FOUR
WAR & NATIONALISM

By the end of the 13th century, the political nation in England had forgotten its Anglo-Saxon past, since the aristocracy and the literate classes had been part of a French-speaking world for over 200 years; but Anglo-Saxon culture lived on in folklore and legend, in the worship of Old English Saints, in the parish church and in the pub, for the pub was one of the earliest of English institutions, never reproduced in France. The old culture certainly lived on in the language, for the majority of Englishmen and women never learned to speak French, or any version of it.

But, while England and the English survived the Norman Conquest well enough, in terms of territory, people, and language, 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. When the national spirit re-surfaced in England, it was English, rather than British, except in the fiction concerning King Arthur and his knights.

The Birth of English Nationalism

Nationalism has often 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. Unlike the Italians and the Germans, the English did not need to organise or fight for their own state, because they had already had one in the time of Alfred the Great (who ruled the West Saxons from 871 to 886 but the Anglo-Saxons as a whole between 886 and 899 C.E.). The English problem was that this state had been conquered, and its language had gone underground. After 1066 the official languages of government, as well as of polite society, chivalry and literature, were French and Latin.

When the vernacular re-emerged, it had ceased to be Anglo-Saxon had become 'Middle English'; and this was associated with a new kind of nationalism. Some 20 years ago, Thurlac Turville-Petre argued 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 (as we have noted) wrote about the Norman Yoke, and 'fashioned a history of the nation in which three features (language, literature and national identity) were inter-twined'.

Robert Manning tells us 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, who placed Arthur in the centre of a mythical stage. 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 for the English who are, by the way, of good character 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];

Not everyone agrees with Turville-Petre's theory that English cultural identity re-emerged in the early 14th century. Many historians have argued that this phenomenon was largely a product of 'the Hundred Years War' and that it is only clearly manifest in the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400), John Gower (1330-1408) and William Langland (1332-1386), and in the letters and state papers of Henry V (r. 1413-1422). However, if we are to attribute importance to the Hundred Years War, it should be remembered that this was not the first war in which the English and the French were involved; and, in particular that there was a war between Edward I of England (r. 1272-1307) and Philip the Fair of France (r. 1285-1314), which coincided in time with the earliest decade of Thurville-Petre's chosen period.

Edward and Philip resembled each other in many ways. They both had 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 (whose most prominent members were burnt at the stake). The two monarchs clashed over the English Duchy of Gascony, because neither could live with the settlement of the dispute reached in Paris in 1259, between Henry III and Louis IX. 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 wars in Scotland, and indeed the two conflicts became one, because the Scots allied with the French as early as 1294, thereby forming the 'Auld Alliance', which endured for almost 300 years.

Edward I spoke French as his first language but he played the English card by mounting expeditions in Wales, Scotland and France; and he was well placed to do this. His father had called him Edward after King Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066), whose shrine lay in the new abbey at Westminster, rebuilt by Henry III. Edward presented his dynastic disputes as if they involved the whole nation; and,

like most medieval monarchs, he had almost total control of the media - the clergy, the pulpit and the town crier.

Edward ran into difficulties when he summoned the feudal host to go with him to Gascony in 1294, because it was unclear whether the feudal obligation to render military service to the King of England was due, when the King mounted an expedition abroad. When he issued a summons of a similar nature the following year, Edward included a warning as to what the French might do next, if he did not receive the support of his subjects:

> 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 this more than 'Project Fear'? 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, and there was good reason to think they might try again:

> 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. (Michael Prestwich)

Edward I regarded the Welsh and Scots as traitors, because they rejected feudal bonds which tied them to the English monarchy, and this may have reflected a popular English contempt for their neighbours. During the Edwardian conquest of Wales the Archbishop of Canterbury remarked that the Welsh were 'idle, immoral and dishonest', while the King himself apparently remarked, on leaving Scotland, that 'A man does good business, when he rids himself of a turd'. Some Englishmen, especially in the North, held the Scots in 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.'

The other side of the coin is that Anglophobia was common abroad. Foreigners were taught that 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 Ranulph Higden - who wrote a 'Universal Chronicle' - considered 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 an echo here of the old French idea of *L'Albion Perfide* - Perfidious Albion: the English were not to 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, on both sides of the Channel, in art and architecture, 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 only canonised in 1920. Statues of Joan remain visible in almost every French town, for she was the perfect heroine for the modern age - a patriot and a warrior, who was a devout Catholic, a peasant and female.

While Edward I's war with the French had been confined to Gascony, Edward III took the fight to Flanders, then Normandy and Gascony, and finally to Paris itself. His successes were built on his close relationship with the military class, 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 - at least in England - by the so-called 'Babylonian captivity', when the Pope resided in Avignon rather than in Rome (1309-1377) and by the Great Schism which followed, when there were two (and sometimes three) Popes in contention. 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 supported the Pope in Avignon. The healing of the Schism involved several General Councils of the Church; but, in England, papal power was restricted by a series of statutes by which the monarchy took back control of appointments to bishoprics and abbeys. As a result of these developments 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.

The English were remarkably successful militarily, both on land and at sea, between 1337 and 1360. Their victories at Crécy, Sluys, and Poitiers made them both famous and infamous. The chronicler Jean le Bel wrote:

> When the noble Edward (III) 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. The upper classes had to be taught how to speak it now, rather than learning 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 [fluently],
After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hir unknown.

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 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. There are no fewer than 184 versions of the English translation of the Brut chronicle in medieval and post-medieval manuscripts, a figure which is only exceeded 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 paints a wholly different picture. *The Canterbury Tales* is full of characters who are 'just about managing'; but who can 'take it' and are still 'open for business', and they contrive to preserve their sense of humour all the while. Which nation does this remind you of?

Contrary to what we have often been led to believe, England experienced both triumph and disaster during the Hundred Years War. In the 1370s and 1380s the French regained the upper hand both militarily and diplomatically; and in some years there was a serious fear of invasion. This may come as a surprise to many Englishmen and women. 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 there were similar scares 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 and destruction of England. The document in question 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 the putative French invasion, the English would have been forced 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, an impressive number of men, ships and stores was assembled, 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 after all; but in May 1385 a 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 even succeeded in taking the castle of Wark in Northumberland. Meanwhile, Jean de Vienne led his men in an attack on the West March, launching an unsuccessful attack on Carlisle in September. The whole episode undermined confidence in the value of the Auld Alliance, both in Scotland and in France.

In her contribution to the original *Oxford History of England*, entitled *The Fourteenth Century* (1959), May Mckisack expressed the opinion that the war with the French 'bred a Francophobia, which died hard'. She cited the poets Laurence Minot (c. 1300 – c. 1352) and William Langland (c.1332 – c.1386) author of *Piers Plowman*, and the chroniclers Ranulph Higden (c. 1280 - 1364) and Henry Knighton (d. c. 1396) in support of her argument. For Minot at least Edward III was a hero, while Philip VI of France was a coward:

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

Francophobia is a morbid kind 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 'French dog', while he reminded himself that 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 illustration of English dislike of the French comes from the pages of Froissart's *Chronicles*. The writer tells of the Duke of Gloucester's reaction when he heard that a French army had been defeated by the Ottoman Turks at Nicopolis (in modern Bulgaria) in 1396. This was the first time a Western army of Crusaders had encountered the Turks; and the result was that it was virtually annihilated, though several prominent members of the French nobility were taken prisoner. Yet the Duke of Gloucester appeared to take pleasure in this catastrophic defeat for Christendom:

> Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, the youngest son of King Edward III 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 (the father of English printing) addressed scathing remarks to the knights of his 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!

Was this simply the familiar complaint of an old man, that things were not as they used to be, and the young did not behave properly, or had something really been lost?

The Welsh Princes of Wales

It is a persistent theme in Gwynfor Evans's *Land of My Fathers* that Wales was one country long before England was, that the Welsh were a nation long before the English were, and that the Welsh always yearned to be free. So, as early as the 12th century, Gerald of Wales (or Giraldus Cambrensis, to give him his Latin name) wrote about the Welsy in lyrical terms:

> 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 nationalist point of view, the English were different. They were a people bent on dominating their neighbours, and (unfortunately) they were well-equipped to do so. Writing of the late 13th century, Evans put it this way:

> 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 was 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 by the English authorities. Here is what Evans 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, 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.

Between 1276 and 1283, Edward I of England conquered Llywelyn the Last's powerbase in Gwynedd, in two brutal wars which saw the English monarch deployed unprededented quantities of men and equipment. Llywelyn was killed in battle, while his brother Dafydd was executed. Evans writes with great bitterness about the conquest, and the execution of the Welsh leader, which recalls the treatment meted out to Sir William Wallace in Scotland some years later:

> 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.

After the conquest there were only three Welshmen who claimed the title of Prince of Wales, the last being Owain Glyndŵr, 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 castle at Caernarfon. 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 frustrating English plans in France; but in Welsh history, he cuts a 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 Owain Lawgoch another navy and an army of 4,000 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, while a Spanish navy defeated the English near La Rochelle. In 1375 Owain took his company of 400 men to Switzerland to fight against the Austrians. There he became a colourful figure in the legends of Berne, but he was 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 of these involved a Dafydd Meurig of Betws Bledrws, who 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 they found steps leading down to a cave lit 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 in France, where he was murdered.

The Gaelic Resurgence in Ireland

In P.S. O'Hegarty's books 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 stereotypical 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, 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 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 the more famous Robert.

Edward Bruce 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 some 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, while promising continued support. Edward Bruce remained in Ireland, where the Anglo-Norman barons could do little, since famine made it difficult for them as well.

Bruce'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 its 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 lacked legitimacy 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, and his body (as we have by now come to expect) was quartered and sent to various towns in Ireland, while his head was delivered to King Edward II.

Edward Bruce was not universally popular, even amongst the Gaelic Irish. The *Annals of Ulster* concluded that he had not only failed to drive the settlers out -

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.

But in P.S.O'Hegarty's history, the Bruce episode was crucial:

> 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 thought that the Norman and English settlers in Ireland were in great danger of losing their separate identity. 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 language, 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 Glyndŵr's revolt. The statutes of Kilkenny forbade intermarriage between native Irish and native English; the English fostering of Irish children; and 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 abandoned, 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, to 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 policy of coercion (so often adopted by the English in Ireland!) does

not seem to have worked; and there is a revealing record of its failure, and of what the English thought about the Irish in the 1390s in Froissart's *Chronicles*. The chronicler recorded a meeting with Henry Crystede, an Englishman who had been captured seven years earlier. 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. (Bardon)

CHAPTER FIVE
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 the parliamentary decision to trigger Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, and thereby ensure that the UK should leave the European Union, as a defining moment in 'our' history, comparable with Henry V's victory at Agincourtin 1415. This is a curious comparison to make, since the vote to leave the EU in 2016 was not so much a victory over a foreign power, as the victory of one body of British opinion over another. (Incidentally, Polly Toynbee remarked that Brexit reminded her more of Dunkirk, than Agincourt). But it is doubly inappropriate to compare Brexit with Agincourt, because Agincourt was an English victory, not a British one: the Scots voted by two to one to Remain, the Northern Irish voted by a simple majority to Remain, while the Welsh voted by a simple majority to Leave.

Likewise, when Rees-Mogg told his supporters that 'We win all these things!' (meaning that the English always beat the French on the field of battle during the Hundred Years War, he was at least guilty of a terminological inexactitude because, while the English won the Battle of Agincourt, the French won the Battles of Patay (1429), Formigny (1450) and Castillon (1453) and, more importantly, drove us out of France altogether in the 1450s, thereby 'winning' the War as a whole.

Like many English people, Rees-Mogg probably got his history from Shakespeare, whose play *Henry V* features Captains MacMorris, Jamy and 'Fluellen' – an Irishman, a Scotsman and a Welshman – in starring roles; but the Bard did this for dramatic effect and these characters bears no resemblance to any historical personages.

The supposed Irish involvement was non-existent. Ireland had been slipping from the English grasp for decades (see previous chapter) and Henry V did little to reverse this. The Irish writer who compiled the *Annals of Loch Cé* did not even mention Agincourt, though he recorded a local battle when Lord 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 - the Scots were a fiercely independent kingdom, allied with the French and disposed to invade the North of

England when the opportunity arose. So Henry V had to leave forces in the northern Marches to ensure that the Scots did not cause trouble for him at home, when he mounted the Agincourt expedition; and the Scots chronicler Walter Bower was very hostile to Henry and all his achievements. Ironically, the only Scotsman thought to have celebrated Henry's great victory was the Scots King, but this was because he was a captive in England at the time, and had little choice.

After Agincourt, the Auld Alliance was revived and Scots sent whole armies to assist the French. 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; and the alliance between Scots and French was renewed four times in the 15th century. It was only terminated formally in 1560.

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 that strong Welsh nationalist Gwynfor Evans subscribed to the view that 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 as a nation played a dominant role there is a myth. Anne Curry has pointed out that as many archers were recruited in Lancashire as in South Wales in 1415, and that none were recruited in North Wales, whose loyalty was still in doubt after Glyndŵr's Rebellion.

In these circumstances, how can it be right to claim that Agincourt was a British victory?

A Decisive Victory?

Henry V had a propaganda machine, and wanted the anniversary of the great battle to be remembered; but he felt obliged to consult with the Church as to how this should 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 also 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. 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 Archdiocese of Canterbury.

At the same time, Henry V's spokesmen milked Agincourt for all that it was worth, when addressing Parliament. One told the Parliament which sat in March 1416 that God had now intervened in the long war with the French 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 and it was 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.

Was Agincourt a decisive battle? In my view, its importance has been grossly exaggerated by the English. It was not a victory to be compared with Duke William of Normandy's victory at Hastings in 1066, or 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, which is scarcely remembered here). Agincourt was not even decisive in terms of Henry V's conquest of northern France; and it 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 kings of England and France. His dominions stretched from the Baltic to the Mediterranean and from the Rhône to the Black Sea; and they included what we now call 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 as a whole. After his great victory over a Western Christian army at Nicopolis in 1396, the Ottoman Turkish Sultan Bayazid had threatened to march on Rome and 'let his horse eat corn upon St Peter's altar'. Sultan 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 famous 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 which he and Henry had exchanged, 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 in the Church of Rome 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).

The main success at the Council of Constance, from the English point of view, was insular, 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 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 deployed several (mostly spurious) arguments for separate English representation, based on putative size, geography, history and the numerous languages of 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 and 1449, the practice of sitting as nations was abandoned.[2]

Henry V was an orthodox Roman Catholic and an enthusiastic persecutor of heretics, in particular the Lollards. In the Parliament of 1420 the Lord Chancellor praised him, not only for his military achievements in France, but for 'the destruction and crushing of heresies and Lollardy here within the kingdom'; but Pope Martin V thought that the heresy still constituted a dangerous threat to the Catholic Faith. When the Pope wrote to the English Church in 1428 (urging it to lend its assistance 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 taking of Ceuta was hailed by the Council in Constance as a victory for the whole of Christendom, since the port

[2] For a very different view see Malcolm Vale, *The Ancient Enemy*, pp 68-71.

had been in Muslim hands for 700 years. It remains in Iberian hands to this day, though it is also 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. The most important prisoner, Charles Duke of Orléans, had been a captive for twenty-five years and Henry, who was a pious man, thought it was high 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, which was still very far from being the case.

The young king's advisers issued a broadsheet in his name, justifying the decision to release Orléans on the grounds of humanity as well as expediency. The argument was brutally realistic. The War had been going on for a hundred years. Even Edward III had not managed to make himself King of France, for all his many victories on the battlefield; and indeed he had settled for an 'easy part' of the kingdom at Brétigny in 1360. In any case, it was impossible to conquer the whole of the French kingdom, because it was too 'ample, great, and so mighty in multitude of walled towns, castles and fortresses, in rivers and strong counties'. Most strikingly, however, it was 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, Henry VI had been less than twelve months old when Henry V died. He could not have spoken to his father about the matter; and it is unlikely that he would have been fed these ideas by his uncles of Bedford or Gloucester, who both remained attached to the war. It is much more likely that those who drafted the royal declaration were giving voice to the young King's own ideas, though he was still only 16. The important thing about the royal proclamation of 1437, however, is that Henry V's prestige was still so great that, even when he argued for peace, Henry VI felt obliged to invoke the memory of Agincourt.

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, the playwright took great liberties with the facts. He telescoped the five years after Agincourt into just one month; and the action shifted directly from Agincourt in 1415 to Henry's marriage to the daughter of Charles VI and the Treaty of Troyes in 1422, thereby omitting his conquest of Normandy between 1417 and 1419, and the murder of the Duke of Burgundy by French royalists in 1419. These events were just as important as the battle itself in deciding the fate of the French kingdom; but Shakespeare's aim was to write compelling drama; and, though he was not the first to invent speeches for his principal character, he had a unique ability to turn them into unforgettable poetry, thereby establishing a history of his own. Michelet thought that he was as great an historian as Tacitus.

The result was that Henry V has been celebrated as a hero ever since, to a greater extent than he was, even in his own day, despite the fact that in Elizabethan times England was an enthusiastically Protestant country, whereas Henry had been an enthusiastic persecutor of heretics. At the same time, a powerful myth was created, that a numerically inferior, but highly motivated, army can prevail against all the odds; and this is a something which has periodically provided great comfort for the English, and even the British, in time of war. For all the criticisms the play has received, *Henry V* continues to delight audiences. Sir Laurence Olivier's success in the leading role during and after the Second World War is well known; but the writer remembers that, even forty years later, Mark Rylance received an embarrassingly jingoistic reception at the newly restored *Globe* in Southwark, though there must have been many foreigners in the audience.

Yet historians had begun to deconstruct the patriotic myth in the 18th century. In his *Essay at removing national prejudicies against a union with Scotland* (1706) Daniel Defoe downgraded Agincourt, by referring to the fact that France had soon 'recovered herself' under Charles VII, by courtesy of her alliance with the Scots. A little later 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 voiced the opinion of many in writing that Henry V had taken an unacceptably high degree of risk in continuing with his expedition at all, after the siege of Harfleur.

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 Azincourt and Waterloo; 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 about the medieval battle 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 was guilty 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 conflicts in which the United Kingdom (created only in 1707) had been involved. Imperial Germany was more populous than Britain, and she had already outstripped her in terms of industrial production. Recently, she had also constructed a Fleet which was comparable in size to 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 entirely predictable that productions of *Henry V* would be staged, when war came. 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. In the end, 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, as 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 had done; and Olivier first 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* in order to boost the morale of British troops who were preparing to invade Normandy; and the film was dedicated 'To the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture' although, by the time it was released, D-Day had already come and gone. The film took even more liberties with the truth than Shakespeare's text; 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 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 by this? 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; and 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 Churchill's dynastic tapestry more closely, the glorious pattern fades into invisibility. 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 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 (see previous chapter). The late Maurice Keen, who was a great admirer of Henry V's many talents, nevertheless

questioned his judgment, in an essay he contiributed 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. .

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 Owain Glyndŵr. 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 expeditions to France conducted in 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 experience in Wales was the foundation of his later success in France. In 1987 Desmond Seward also 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) told

us that Prince Henry's career in Wales was 'not particularly successful'. She conceded that the Welsh were more formidable adversaries than anyone had expected, but thought that Henry's military experience was limited to 'small-scale inconclusive campaigns against guerrillas' and regarded his failure to take Aberystwyth in 1407 as sheer incompetence. Nevertheless, Henry V was at least nominally in charge when his father's armies crushed the Welsh Prince of Wales in the field and Glyndŵr fled to the mountains.

How Welsh was Glyndŵr? 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:

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

Gwynfor Evans 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 Glyndŵr'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.

Glyndŵr was 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 there is scarcely a trace left of his mansion at Sycharth.

Glyndŵr's revolt was the single most important rising in Welsh history, against English rule; and the English Parliament reacted by enacting a set of penal laws which subjected the entire Welsh people to a form of apartheid, comparable with the one established in Ireland by the Statutes of Kilkenny (see previous chapter). These laws stayed on the statute book until the reign of James VI & I; and, although 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 Glyndŵr looked like; but there are at least three very different statues of him in Wales. The first, in marble, is in Cardiff City Hall and was unveiled by David Lloyd George in 1916, when the latter became Prime Minister. This Owain is portrayed as a statesman, with parchment in hand; and he is clearly no 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 the Welsh nationalist party *Plaid Cymru* plays a prominent role in the Welsh Assembly. Glyndŵr snarls defiance at us - particularly one feels, at 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 a famous letter to the King of France in 1406. It stands in the Princes' Memorial Garden, created in 2004, and the Princes commemorated there are Welsh, not English. This Owain is a infantryman, guerrilla and freedom fighter, while his surcoat 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 long struggle for independence. It also represents the many legends which suggested that he had magical powers. 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. Supposedly, all three stand ready to answer their country's call, even now.

CHAPTER SIX
NATION STATE

The Tudor period, and in particular the Elizabethan Age, was a golden one for Puritans like Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), and it has continued to be 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 I avoided the Wars of Religion which brought France to its knees and fought off the attentions of Catholic Spain when her Navy defeated the Spanish Armada, regarded by Spaniards as 'Invincible'.

In the 20th century, English academic historians pointed out the shortcomings of this nationalistic narrative. Historians now tell us Henry VII was a typically 'medieval' monarch - and rather a crabby one at that; that Henry VIII was a hypocrite, who broke with Rome and dissolved the monasteries for purely personal reasons, and dealt with his opponents in an especially ruthless way, whilst even the great Elizabeth's ministers were zealous persecutors of priests and Jesuits. In these ways, the traditional Protestant narrative has to a large extent been displaced by the traditionally Catholic. However, none of this seems to have penetrated the popular consciousness, at least when it comes to Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. In the English mind's eye, Henry is still seen as a loveable, though very rough, sort of rogue, while Elizabeth is still the saviour of the nation, on a par with Nelson, Wellington and Churchill.

Henry VIII

Pollard believed that Henry VIII was an unsung hero, who ought to have been called 'Great', while Geoffrey Elton argued that it was during Henry VIII's reign that England became a modern state - that there was indeed a 'revolution in government', though the idea did not find favour with medievalists. 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 was handsome and had charisma.

Like his father, Henry VIII 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 Round Table. In 1522 he had the ancient table on display in Winchester Castle painted for the first time, and a portrait of Henry was placed at the head of the table.

Father Lingard described the older Henry in very different terms:

> He 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; 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 in 1533, by means of the Act in Restraint of Appeals. 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 with English law and in English affairs.

After the Norman Conquest, two systems of law had become 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, which was based on Roman law. 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 on a whole range of matters lay to Rome and, for 300 years after 1066, Papal jurisdiction had expanded inexorably. This was why Henry VIII had to go to Rome to petition for divorce, but his was only the most prominent (and embarrassing) example of the inconvenience, expense and delay which the litigant might suffer, as a result of the existence of more than one jurisdiction.

There was therefore a parallel between the Church of Rome and the Europeann Union, in that the Pope had considerable legislative and judicial powers in England; but the Act in Restraint of Appeals of 1533 put an end to these. It did so by asserting the sovereignty of the English Crown, declaring that England was an 'Empire' and that the English crown was an 'Imperial Crown'. The English ecclesiastical courts, in Canterbury and York, became the supreme arbiters of canon law.

The resemblance to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2017 is striking; but in historical terms the important thing was that the severing of the links with Rome 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), though 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. Traditionally, Catholic historians regarded the Reformation as an unjustified rebellion; but, given

that St Augustine had arrived in Kent around 1,000 years previously, we would also be justified in regarding it as a revolution, though it was a revolution imposed from above.

The changes brought about by Henry VIII were more than just religious: government and politics were profoundly affected. Students of constitutional history have been taught that the Reformation Parliament was a landmark in English (and indeed British) history, because this was the first time that the Crown 'went into partnership' with our most important representative assembly. Looking at the wider picture, and these Islands as a whole, Henry VIII was able to impose his will in England and Ireland (where he assumed the royal title for the first time); but not in independent Scotland.

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 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's verdict on Henry:

> 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

Under Edward VI the English Reformation took a radical turn in the direction of Protestantism. Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries was now followed by the abolition of chantries and chantry chapels and by the transformation of around 10,000 parish churches. Edward's reign (1547-1553) also saw English xenophobia reach new heights. The Italian Andreas Franciscus told a friend how the Londoners hated all immigrants and, in particular, 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 already been overlaid with 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 of 2016-19 – and they could certainly compete with any present day journalist for a prize in the manufacture of 'fake news'. But most of what they declaim as truth is pure fiction. For example, the French herald accuses the English of 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 that there was ever a female Pope during the Middle Ages (or since). Nor is this something which is at all probable.

Much of the argument is about age and pedigree. 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, thre score and syxe yere after the deth of Christ, beyng long before any Hungarien, nowe Frenchemen, reygned in Fraunce.

This is nonsense, of course; but note the extraordinary English suggestion - repeated several times - that the French are not even really French, but Hungarian refugees. (To call someone a 'Hungarian' in the 16th century was much the same as calling the Germans 'the Hun' in the early part of the 20th). The English herald explains why, at some length, though it is all nonsense:

> 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 tells us next that the English have the better 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.

The French may claim that Charlemagne was one of the Nine Worthies too (as to which see chapter 9 below); but in fact, says the English herald, he wasn't really French, but came from the Low Countries ('a Dowcheman'). In the same way, William the Conqueror wasn't really French, since he was of Viking descent.

Next, there is the question of size. According to the English herald, England is geographically larger than France:

> 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, that Fraunce [is] a lytell countre in comparason to England.

This is a very surprising statement since, although the French kingdom was much smaller in the 16th century than the French republic is now, it was still far larger than England; and seasoned travellers were well aware of this, despite the absence of reliable maps. We can only conclude that the English Herald was deliberately being insulting.

Turning from geography to history, the English Herald went on to boast that one Englishman was worth several Frenchmen in battle:

> 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. He also demonstrated that there was a significant new element in English nationalism, in the form of Protestant distaste for Roman Catholicism:

> You have in Fraunce many bysshops, of whom fewe learned, only in the tradicions of man and lawes of Antichrist, 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 call them, all Fraunce is full of them, as nuns, friers, monks, canons, hermytes, 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.

Before leaving the *Debate between the Heralds*, which seems to contain the quintessence of Tudor insularity, a word of warning may be in order. In *The Ancient Enemy*, his brilliant summary of Anglo-French relations between 1154 and 1558, Malcolm Vale cautions the reader to remember that, throughout the Tudor period 'the ancient enmity was offset and balanced by fraternization'; and that 'French speech and a more general francophone culture continued to be acquired and cultivated among the English aristocracy'.

'Bloody Mary'

Queen Mary Tudor reigned between 1553 and 1558, when she died at the age of 42. She was a devout Roman Catholic, who was born the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, and married Philip II of Spain. She managed to restore English relations with the Papacy, and made some progress in re-establishing Catholic forms of worship in the parish churches of England; but, in the brief time available, she was unable to restore the monasteries and chantries which her father and brother had dissolved. Her subsequent notoriety as 'Bloody Mary' is largely the result of the enormous popularity of John Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' in publicising the fate of those Protestants who were burnt at the stake during her reign. H.E.Marshall told the tale, so familiar to my generation, though she did not like to use the word 'bloody' in view of the tender age of her readers:

> 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, when I was young, children who attended Roman Catholic schools were taught that the Reformers were rebels, and that they had been guilty of excesses too. Here is Father Lingard's argument:

> If anything could be urged in extenuation of [the Marian 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 balanced 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 did so in his *Cankered Rose* of 1959). She is the star of many films and TV costume dramas and is the only woman represented in the 18th century Temple of British Worthies at Stowe. She is chiefly famous because of the speech which she gave at Tilbury in 1588 when England faced invasion by the Duke of Parma's 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 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 she 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 have in 1940, if the Germans had managed to land their Panzers; but Parma was not able to join up with the Armada, and Spain's finest ships were either destroyed or wrecked in storm.

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'. This was largely the result of religious differences, since Spanish troops formed the vanguard of the Counter-Reformation; but Spain

also posed a threat to Protestant England because she had become a superpower. In the late 16th century, she occupied most of South and Central America, as well as controlling large parts of Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and France. Spanish cruelty towards the American Indians had been well-publicised by Bartolomé de las Casas in his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, while the atrocities committed by Spanish troops during the Dutch War of Independence (1568-1648) were also notorious in England. In addition John Foxe devoted a whole chapter of his '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'.

Foxe's book was one of a trio 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 that the Papacy was a malevolent influence, and the Church had had been heading in the wrong direction for around 1,000 years. The true Church was to be found in the congregations of a few faithful souls in England, and not in anything deriving from Rome. This revolutionary view of history was reinforced by the work of the historian William Camden (1551-1623), who also 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 [of Monmouth] and [focussing 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*).

However, the high priest of English nationalism in the Tudor period must surely be William Shakespeare. 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 was another point of view, even of Good Queen Bess, summarised once more by Father Lingard. He pointed to the persecution of Roman Catholics during her reign. 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 treason and received 'rough justice' as a result:

> 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. Any one of these crimes was sufficient to consign him to the scaffold.

Ireland

The sceptred isle imagined by Shakespeare rarely appears to be a demi-paradisemwhen viewed from across the Irish Sea; and this was 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 the new religion was imposed and never took root. Writing in 1918, P.S. O'Hegarty accordingly 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 Act 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 on lands confiscated from the Catholic Irish. As O'Hegarty describes them:

> 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 of extermination 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; and it 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 wasthe 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 simply an act of genocide. O'Hegarty states this theory clearly, whilst also being sceptical about the motives for 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 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 wrote about 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. (Jonathan Bardon)

CHAPTER SEVEN
REVOLUTION?

In stark contrast to the Tudor monarchs, the Stuarts have not enjoyed a good press in England. They were all, of course, of Scottish descent; and James VI & I, the first of them to ascend the throne of England, made a poor first impression there. Far too fond of his pet theories about religion and government, and of his Scottish favourites, he aroused the distrust of English parliamentarians and Puritans, while his son Charles I lacked judgement. Even Charles's greatest advocate, Edward Hyde M.P., later Earl of Clarendon, was criticial

> 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.

But the reputation of Oliver Cromwell has also been mixed. He has long been hated in Ireland while (even in England) he was, in Father Lingard's eyes, 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 Master of Balliol College, Oxford, Christopher Hill, wrote of Cromwell as an English country gentleman who presided over a revolution in the 1640s, only to turn 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 the leader of the Soviet Union, and they fell into conversation about events in England in the mid-17th century. Stalin remarked that Cromwell had

overthrown the existing social order by force. Wells replied that Oliver had acted constitutionally; 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)

Whichever side of the argument we may adopt, it is surprising that Cromwell is commemorated by means of a prominent statue outside the Houses of Parliament, since he was never able to convene a Parliament which agreed with him as to the way forward, nor even the general direction of travel.

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 thought to be insufficient. Great events had to have deep and (preferably) material causes, or so at least it was thought.

Some historians supposed that religious belief must be intimately connected with the economics or ethos of the society in which it was rooted - for example, Marx, Weber, Tawney and Christopher Hill. These historians were not unaware of the religious persuasion of the men who made the revolution; but they played this down. So, in Hill's *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. More like a Christian fundamentalist than a modern nonconformist, Oliver 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 to impose 'Arminian' forms of worship and discipline (though many Puritans thought these were little better than 'Popery'). He rose to prominence as a result of his military successes, which continued through all through his career; but he believed that these 'providences', which showed that God was on his side, and on the side of the English. 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 (though that was also the day on which he died, in 1658).

John Morrill and Blair Worden have commented that Cromwell's writing and speeches were 'suffused with biblical references'. 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 General Fairfax, who refused to sign at all.

Cromwell was at heart a conservative country gentlemen, favouring a constitution with some element of 'monarchical power'. He was no social revolutionary, saying on one occasion that 'a nobleman, a gentleman, a yeoman, that is a good interest of the land and a great one.' The Instrument of Government of 1654, which made him Lord Protector for life, granted him most of the powers of a King, but without the title. The old privy council was transformed into a Council of State, which had powers to issue ordinances that were legally binding, pending ratification by Parliament.

Oliver's Protectorate lasted 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.

As Protector, 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 in Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery by W. F. Yeames R.A. (1835–1918). This is entitled *'And When Did You Last See Your Father?'* 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 - or so most gentlemen came to think (and gentlemen comprised the bulk of the political nation).

One might indeed wonder how Cromwell ever acquired his reputation as a champion of Parliament; but 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; and that he had good reasons for dissolving the Rump; but the summoning of a nominated parliament known as 'Barebones's Parliament', and the rule of the Major Generals, suggest that Oliver saw Parliament as a means to an end, which was some kind of 'Godly rule,' unknown to traditional English constitutional practice.

The Bourgeois Revolution

The Earl of Clarendon wrote about the upheavals which took place between 1640 and 1660 as 'the Great Rebellion', while in recent years the phrase 'The War of Three Kingdoms' has been fashionable; but in the 1960s, the period in question was almost always referred to as 'the English Revolution'. This was largely due to the popularity of Christopher Hill's lectures and books, of which the prototype was *The English Revolution of 1640*, first published in 1940.

For many years Hill was a member of the Communist Party, and he remained a Marxist all his life. He was also Master of Balliol 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 political (and intellectual) developments. He admitted that he might not have adequately or precisely established those links; but he had no doubt that they existed. The iron law 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, or resorted to simple arithmetic, let alone econometrics.

Hill always had his critics. A.L.Rowse wondered if we were any wiser for knowing what a few revolutionary extremists had thought, rather than members of 'the Establishment'; J.H.Hexter questioned Hill's methodology; B.H.G.Wormald agreed with the Earl of Clarendon that there had been a Rebellion, but not a Revolution; and Peter Laslett, applying a sociological approach, argued 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's *Century of Revolution* was a school textbook when I studied 'A' level English history between 1963 and 1965; and his views seemed to become the dominant ideology in the years that followed. But his books were almost exclusively about English history, not British.

In time, Hill conceded that the revolution had not been of the classic Marxist variety. Thus, in *God's Englishman, Oliver Cromwell and the English Revoliution* (1970), he argued that there was no revolutionary ideology at work between 1640 and 1660, and that no social revolution had taken place. 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* (which was re-published in 1967 and 1997) and in *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, though they never seized power; that the world had, 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 in it. 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 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, in particular court records of various types in Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire; and everywhere he found 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 number of people who wanted to turn the world upside down was very few.

The innate conservatism of English people explains the revival of Royalism in 1646-8, culminating in the Second Civil War. This popular royalism led to widespread dissatisfaction with both the Rump Parliament and the New Model Army. Cromwell's ascendancy during the 1650s was therefore based on raw military power and he never succeeded in basing his regime on any widespread political, let alone Parliamentary, consensus. The Restoration of the monarchy became almost inevitable, and it 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).

` Perhaps the most devastating critique of Hill's work, though, was Alastair Maclachlan's *Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England - An Essay on the Fabrication of Seventeenth Century History* (1996) - 'fabrication'is after all a strong word; but other writers have sought to establish an alternative explanation for the political upheaval which undoubtedly took place after 1640 in the importance of the links between events in England, Scotland and Ireland – see especially Conrad Russell in *The Fall of the British Monarchies* (1991).

In conclusion it seems that there was no English Revolution in 1640, and very little desire for one. The really radical groups - the Quakers, Muggletonians, Diggers, and Fifth-Monarchy Men – were few and far between, though their opponents tended to exaggerate the danger they posed.

Cromwell's British Commonwealth

After King Charles I was beheaded 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. Cromwell did indeed blame the Irish Catholics for the war in Ireland during the 1640s, and the Catholic Church for its persecution of Protestants generally. 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 in 1649, Cromwell stormed and sacked the ports of Drogheda and Wexford, to secure his lines of supply. At Drogheda his troops killed nearly 3,500 people, (including some 2,700 Royalist soldiers and all the men in the town who were found carrying arms, but also (according to some reports) some civilians, prisoners and Roman Catholic priests. At the siege of Wexford 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.

In 1999 Tom Reilly caused a storm of his own in Ireland, with his book *Cromwell: An Honourable Enemy*, in which he disputed the conventional Irish wisdom that Cromwell was guilty of inexcusable atrocities. He went back to the original sources and showed 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, in arguing 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 wholesale expropriation, transplantation and transportation; and even Christopher Hill - a great admirer of Cromwell in many ways - did not seek to excuse Oliver's attitude to the Irish:

> [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 added overtones of fear to the contempt and hatred. (Hill, 1970).

Christopher Hill added that there was yet a further ingredient to be added to the poisonus broth of emotion 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 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 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 at this time

> 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, and after the Scots had proclaimed Charles I's eldest son as king, Cromwell invaded Scotland. He was much less hostile to the Scottish Presbyterians, some of whom had been his allies in the First English Civil War, than he was to the 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 did 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 Edinburgh. The victory was of such 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 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)

In 1652, commissioners sent by the Long Parliament extorted a reluctant consent to the principle of a Union from the Scots. The Scottish Parliament was abolished, and replaced with representation in a Parliament of Great Britain. By the Instrument of Government in 1654, Scotland was assigned thirty members in the British Parliament, and the Protector's ordinances completed the work. Cromwell thereby achieved, in theory, what James VI & I had failed to achieve. From the English point of view, the new Cromwellian Union was intended 'to procure the happiness and prosperity of all that were under the government,' and it was said 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, share the Protector's values and hopes:

> 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 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 parasites. He also incurred unpopularity by making peace with Spain, becoming too close to the Spanish ambassador, Count Gondomar, and standing aside during the Thirty Years War (1618-48), when his own daughter Princess Elizabeth was driven out of her husband's domains in Bohemia and the Palatinate, and the Hapsburgs went on to overrun large parts of Protestant Germany. As for Charles I, he married a 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 carrying off people who dwelt in coastal areas, and selling them into 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.' But her reputation was to change dramatically in the 1650s.

The new English Republic established in 1649 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. Whereas Catholic Spain had posed an existential threat to England in Elizabeth's time, the Protestant Dutch had now emerged as our main rival, in economic and commercial terms. 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 ever been, and they were able to raise larger amounts by way of taxation, and consequently maintained a larger army and navy. It was chiefly this, and especially her newly enhanced sea-power, which transformed England's prospects 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. He even proposed a Union between the Dutch and English Republics; but the Dutch offered a comprehensive free trade agreement - which was unacceptable to the English (since the Dutch were 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 also 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 lucrative commerce 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.

Christopher 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 18th 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 at any European court of Europe except Constantinople; but, under Cromwell, she

established diplomatic relations with Russia, Sweden, Poland, and Brandenburg, while Transylvania and Courland also asked for Oliver's assistance. His ambition 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 Jonathan Swift later 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 a consciousness of nationality embraced the whole English nation during the 'revolutionary decades' between 1640 and 1660:

> 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 EIGHT
BRITISH WORTHIES

Bishop Stubbs published the first volume of his *Constitutional History* two years after the foundation of the Second German Reich in 1871. According to Stubbs, 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 imperial or royal decree. Whatever one thinks of this theory, 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 to make these claims, while converting them into the language of feudal tenure; but none of them adopted the title of Emperor or used the term 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 a 'Norman Empire' was not seriously advanced until Professor John le Patourel did so in 1976. Both concepts are highly debateable.

Formally, there was never a 'British Empire' overseas until Queen Victoria assumed the title of Empress of India in 1876. But in the real world there was undoubtedly a first Empire between 1707 and 1783 (when the thirteen North American colonies became independent) and a second Empire thereafter, which only unravelled in modern times; but some English historians 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. British nationality was a political and legal construct, brought by English expansion, rather than by any true assimilation or profound change of sentiment. British, as opposed to English, nationalism is therefore a latecomer to history, and is understood somewhat differently in the four territories of the United Kingdom. The English have always assumed that being English is the same as being British, and even 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 final, and for everyone's benefit. We gradually 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 taught when I was a child in the 1950s, despite the fact that, by then, Ireland and British India had been partitioned, a 26 county Republic of Ireland had been established, India, West and East Pakistan (Bangladesh), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma (Myanmar) had become independent, and 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. Wales had been a mere Principality prior to its Act of Union in the 16th century and there had been many kingdoms in Ireland prior to Henry VIII's assumption of a single royal title. In addition, Wales and Ireland had been (to a greater or lesser extent) conquered by the English in the Middle Ages, whereas Scotland - a separate kingdom for almost a thousand years - had never been brought to heel. On the contrary, the Scots had prevailed in 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 peacefully and 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 when he came to the English throne 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, one economy and one flag. 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 than England; 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 did not get his way. 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; and Scottish foreign policy moved with James to London; but there was little true harmony. Further, the situation deteriorated rapidly when Charles I tried to impose a new religious settlement in Scotland, which resulted in the Bishops Wars of the late 1630s and Scottish intervention in the English Civil War which followed.

After Charles I's execution, the Scots adopted his son as 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 Revolution of 1688-9 was hardly 'bloodless' in Scotland. Yet in 1707, after each side had issued veiled threats to break up 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 desired by James VI & I had been brought about peacefully, and by constitutional means.

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, any more than there was in the Constitution of the United States, which was drafted some 80 years later. This of course is in contrast to Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007, which expressly allows 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. What did this achieve? First, 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 attempted conquests and no more Border raids, no more 'rough wooings'. 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 an equal 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, most recently, 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*, though 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 it remained unpopular with many people for years thereafter. Magnus Magnusson pointed 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.
>
> However, 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 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 some vowed to repeal the Act of Union itself; 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 loyalty to the Stuart dynasty, ousted in 1688-9; but 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, Mar responded by raising an army of around 12,000

Highlanders – 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 Jacobites 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 chiefs.

If the Highlands of Scotland experienced repression in the 18th century, Scotland as a whole soon 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 her 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 their equivalents 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 was 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, based on Protestantism, rivalry with France, and the possession of a strong Royal Navy - rather than a large standing army. In 1745 the twin forces of Protestantism and the City enabled the Whig Establishment to defeat the last Jacobite Rebellion; and British unity was cemented by the Seven Years' War of 1756-63, which endowed the U.K. with a huge overseas Empire, in India and North America.

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, and in particular in the The Temple of British Worthies, built from the 1730s.

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. These included three pagans (Hector, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar), three Jews (Joshua and the two Maccabees) and three Christians (King Arthur, the Emperor Charlemagne and the Crusader Godfrey of Bouillon). They were first described in the early 14th century in the French poem *The Vows of the Heron.* We have already seen that the English tended to regard Arthur as the most important of these men; but the French sometimes added a Tenth, Bertrand du Guesclin, who was Constable of France in the 1370s. Later writers sometimes referred to a parallel set of nine heroines.

In the modern era, 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 it is at Stowe that we find the most important collection. 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.

With the exception of Queen Elizabeth, these are all men; and all except the

poet Alexander Pope are Protestants. The most remarkable thing 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. In addition, the collection is calculated to appeal to Whigs, rather than to the Tories.

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 eyes of the Whigs at any rate) 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.

This seems rather vague. A more convincing explanation is that the Prince had (somewhat unjustly) 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.

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 relating 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 in England:

[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. This inspired new loyalties, which were enhanced once the Jacobite Rebellions were suppressed and the Highlanders 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 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 the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, being British remained something to be proud of. 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, and that it brought material and intellectual 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' had truly become a thing of the past; and Jacobitism had become an 'elegy' rather than practical politics. He pointed the way forward, and that involved support for the Union.

Scott was by no means alone. Queen Victoria did as much as anyone to popularise the view that England and Scotland might be different, but shared common values. She was 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. As a result, the Highlands became popular with the middle classes as well as the aristocracy.

Finally, there was a fad, then a fashion, and a craze, for Highland dress, Highland tartan and the highland clans, which was chronicled by Hugh Trevor-Roper in the final section of *The Invention of Scotland* (posthumous, 2008). In typically acerbic but entertaining fashion, he showed how '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'). Even George IV paraded through Edinburgh wearing Stuart tartan, though Macaulay snorted that the kilt had once been considered 'by nine Scotchmen out of ten as the dress of a thief'.

In 1905, H.E.M. Marshall wrote, in her *History of Scotland for Children*:

> 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.

It was against this background, though fifty years later, that I first 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 (and especially Indian) 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 History 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 tones:

> [In 1756] 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 childhood 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. Miss Marshall told 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; but I do not remember being taught it at school. Nor is it all obvious when one visits the Temple of British Worthies at Stowe.

CHAPTER NINE
JOHN BULL

The series of wars etween England/Britain and France between 1689 and 1815 is sometimes described as a second 'Hundred Years War'. It began with the Nine Years' War (or 'War of the League of Augsburg') between 1688 and 1697) and finished with the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1715). 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), Oudenarde (1708) and above Blenheim (1704), while the semi-Pyrrhic victory at 'Murderous Malplaquet' (1709) is generally forgotten. Marlborough himself will always be remembered as the donee of Blenheim Palace, and because Winston Churchill was his descendant.

At the time, the War of the Spanish Succession was highly controversial. The Whigs had won the general election of 1708 and were to win again in 1715, but the Tories triumphed in 1710 and 1713; and they were highly critical of the war, and suspicious of Whig motives for waging it.

The Tories were on a roll in 1712, when Dr John Arbuthnot published *The History of John Bull*. In this satire, John Bull (personifying England) brings a lawsuit against the King of France ('Louis Baboon') and the King of Spain ('Lord Strutt'). The enterprise is not very successful. The author tells us all 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.

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

> Nic. was a cunning, sly fellow, quite the reverse of John in many particulars; covetous, frugal minded in 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.

John Bull has a sister, Peg who is Scottish. 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 followers of Jean Calvin, rather than of 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 boob. (The word 'admired' here meant no more than 'wondered at').

John tries to settle matters with Baboon, 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 the legal process:

> 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.

The French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars saw another burst of satire; and, from about 1790, John Bull appeared in more than 500 cartoons, as a stolid, conservative and well-meaning character, dressed like an English country squire, and often contrasted with a scrawny, mean-looking French revolutionary. Sometimes he was a bull, or bulldog, or 'bull man', but at other times he was 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 polarised by Napoleon Bonaparte's assumption of power in France, as First Consul in 1799, and then as Emperor of the French in 1804. The effect of this was to put an end to any doubts John Bull may have had about the wisdom of making war.

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 the 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.

> 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 only in 2002. Throughout its existence, it was famous for its cartoons, which often featured John Bull, as the personification of England, rather than Britain, though the unspoken assumption was that there was no difference, since he frequently sported the Union Jack as part of his attire. He was always fat, even obese, but was a picture of health nonetheless, and the embodiment of English patriotism as well as prejudice. He was usually a farmer, though sometimes a sailor. He was conservative (and sometimes a Conservative), often puzzled by new questions (for example regarding Ireland or China), just as he was bemused by new ideas (such as tariff reform or votes for women).

John Bull appeared in a different light 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 in the late 19th century. So, at the time of the Schleswig Holstein crisis of 1864, Bull was already depicted as a blustering hypocrite, prone to issuing threats to intervene, when he had no intention of doing so. He was by now considered to be a much diminished figure, with no real power on the Continent of Europe.

After Bismarck's triumph in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, 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, to 'harness 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 lived in fear of immigration, in particular of alien German 'paupers', who somehow contrived to flood into England. At the turn of the 20th century, he became a bogeyman or ogre, a bully who was at one and the same time responsible for unspeakable atrocities in South Africa (while lecturing Germany on the need to behave properly on the international stage), and attempting to limit and control her

efforts to acquire colonies, and to develop a Navy commensurate with her new power and status. By contrast, the British Empire was often depicted as a titanic octopus, embracing and stifling every part of the globe.

Billy Pitt

Pitt the Younger became Prime Minister at the age of 24 in 1783 and held office until 1801, and he was P.M. 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, who has become both famous - for standing up to a foreign tyrant- and infamous, for attempting to crush the extra-parliamentary opposition at home. G.M. Trevelyan, the last of the 'Whig' historians, thought little of Pitt, because of the severity of his repressive legislation and even cursed him ('Billy Pitt, damn his eyes': see A.L. Rowse in *Historians I have Known* (1995). By contrast, Rowse - a radical in his youth who became a Thatcherite in the 1980s - thought that Pitt had only done what was necessary.

Pitt's legislation in the 1790s was certainly novel and far-reaching. Individuals who published seditious material were prosecuted and punished, and the writ of *habeas corpus* was suspended. The Combination Acts prohibited workers from entering into contracts for the purposes of improving conditions of employment or calling or even attending meetings convened for such purposes. Later, the game laws - which were notoriously harsh already - were tightened even further, because of the fear that 'Jacobin principles' might spread amongst country folk. Hence, Lord Ellenborough's Act of 1803 created ten new felonies. It became a capital offence to resist lawful arrest by 'shooting, attempting to shoot at, stabbing, or cutting'. The Night Poaching Act of 1816 mandated 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 of England to Australia.

Meanwhile, 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 crush 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. However, they did not get it, because King George III would not agree. 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 for the last time; but the situation in Europe had scarcely improved. In the same year the French Republic proclaimed an hereditary Empire, with Napoleon as Emperor. The French Empire now consisted of 104 departments. 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, for the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. 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.
>
> [Note: he referred to England, not Britain.]

A couple of days earlier, Napoleon had smashed the armies of the Third Coalition at the Battle of Ulm 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 prophetically '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. The British went on to scoop up most of France's remaining colonies, while the French Empire expanded into areas well beyond France's 'natural frontiers', as defined by Louis XIV. Early in 1811 the 'Grand Empire' reached its maximum territorial extent, embracing 130 departments with a total population of some 44 million. Napoleon now had 80 million subjects, if we include the satellite kingdoms of Italy, Spain, and Germany, the confederate states on right bank of the Rhine and Switzerland, the core of Poland, and the north-eastern littoral of the Adriatic.

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 soldier stranded on a rock, facing a raging sea and shaking his fist in defiance at a swarm of planes, which swoop towards him like birds of prey. 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 us then, since Pitt had 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 summarised for 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 than this, even from the English point of view.

After 1691 Ireland was controlled by the minority Protestant Ascendancy, which governed by means of the Penal Laws. These 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. 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 up. In 1782 these Volunteers used their new power to compel the Crown to reform the Irish Parliament, and abolish the need to obtain Westminster's consent to legislation. This new assembly was known as 'Grattan's Parliament', but it still excluded Catholics and Dissenters. The Irish Patriot Party, led by Grattan, then demanded a wider franchise; and the Dublin Parliament enacted legislation, allowing some propertied Catholics to vote (though not to hold office).

The prospect of further 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 forced the Society underground. The United Irishmen's response was to call for independence, and they sought French help, while Wolfe Tone travelled to the USA to seek American assistance. In 1798 -'the year of the French' - the Irish rose in rebellion, which was 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. 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 Catholic 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):

> 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, even Catholic Emancipation, when it came in 1829, brought Ireland little 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 itself had 130 departments but the 'Grand Empire' was far wider and more populous, though in a sense it was also a family business, since Napoleon installed his relatives as rulers in many of parts of Europe. 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; 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. Andrew Roberts gives us chapter and verse in his fawning *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.

These decrees established the 'Continental System', which was strengthened by subsequent edicts 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 the position a generation ago (at a time when the old European Community, or 'Common Market', had expanded from six to 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 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 reality was run for the benefit of France. As such it was never likely to appeal to the inhabitants of other countries. 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 linen manufacture. The ports of Marseille, Bordeaux and La Rochelle suffered especially badly.

This 'Uncommon Market' was not all bad, at least not for everyone. 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, as a whole, the Continental System simply did not work. The customs men who policed it were disliked everywhere, and many proved to be corrupt, as did a number of the French generals who were responsible for surveillance. British traders 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 loans from reserve funds to offset periodic crises in the industrial 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 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, [so that] 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 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 the British survived because of 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.

The UK was even strong enough at this time to take on the USA. When I was a child Lonnie Donegan sang a ballad entitled *The Battle of New Orleans*, which I disliked because I thought it was unpatriotic; but it was also 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 appalling ditty commemorated an American victory over a numerically superior British force in 1812; but honours were even in the War of 1812-1815 as a whole.

So the British came through the Napoleonic Wars; and, since they had 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. Yet there were, and are, many who retain a grudging admiration for Napoleon. In the words of the 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 Horatio 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 TEN
SPLENDID ISOLATION

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 UK's first 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, starting with the often-overlooked truism that the United Kingdom is not the same as England. 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 EEC, EC and EU was necessarily doomed to fail.

Palmerston's Red Line

Viscount Palmerston was Foreign Secretary for much of the 1830s and 1840s and Prime Minister in 1855-8 and 1859-65. 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, Palmerston 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 he did nothing when the Prussians and Austrians actually invaded Denmark in 1864.

Yet Palmerston was already famous for intervening in the affairs of other countries. In Britain he was known as 'Lord Pumice-stone', the fiery politician who had delivered the *civis Romanus sum* speech in 1850, asserting that he would

intervene anywhere in the world in defence of British interests. Abroad, he was thought to favour Liberal - and even republican - causes; but this reputation was misleading. In fact, he was a staunch monarchist and intensely conservative, wanting nothing more than to preserve the balance of power. Whichever side he was on, he undoubtedly authorised or approved of the use of 'gunboat' diplomacy in Naples, Portugal, Greece, China, Japan, Mexico, Syria, Iran and even Afghanistan; but, on the other hand, 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 and his failure to support traditional allies. To quote 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, if it came to a military confrontation; but, at the same time, he knew that the Prussian Army far outnumbered the British. So, when he drew his red line in relation to Denmark in 1864, 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.

There was no real possibility that Britain would intervene to support Denmark. Sympathies at home were keenly divided and Palmerston did not even speak for everyone in his own party. Queen Victoria was strongly opposed to intervention: after all, her late revered husband Albert (who died in 1861) had been German and she thought she knew what his views on the subject would have been. Moreover, her daughter Victoria had married into the Prussian royal family in 1859 - though her son Edward had marred into the Danish more recently, 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', while Bismarck made the obvious but telling remark that 'dreadnoughts have no wheels'. The result was that in 1864, the Prussians and Austrians had little difficulty in overrunning Schleswig-Holstein.

The political problem for Palmerston was that the Danes took him seriously. On 11 February 1864 they appealed to Great Britain for help, relying in part on his speech, and in part on a treaty signed in 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. Despite this assurance, the Prussians and Austrians did invade Denmark, and 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 in the House of Lords

by nine votes. 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). [But] 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...

Despite the political difficulties which the Danish crisis created for Palmerston, it is questionable whether Britain's standing in the world was much diminished by his failure to intervene in support of Denmark. The Prussians must have concluded that they could continue with their campaign with impunity; but the war of 1864 was only the first of three by which Bismarck brought about the unification of Germany; and it is not clear that Britain even wanted to prevent this from happening. Many in Britain still feared France more than Germany and many even 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 it is remarkable that they did so again when the Prussians annexed Hanover in 1866. Hanover had, after all, been united with Britain between 1715 and 1837 (when Queen Victoria had been excluded from the throne of Hanover by the German equivalent of the Salic law). We might have been expected to at least protest; but we did nothing in 1866, the reason being that the Union between the UK and Hanover had always been a personal one. (No-one had ever wanted to bring about an 'ever increasing union' of the British and German peoples there). In addition, the personal union had cooled, since the days when the first Hanoverian kings of England spoke German as their first language, and preferred being in Hanover to being in London.

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 dominated by the idea that we needed to contain France; but the best way of doing that was to stay out of continental warfare, concentrate on the Empire, and rely on the Royal Navy for defence.

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, nor 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, 'wider still and wider'. In addition the Royal Navy was the largest and most powerful in the world. This was clearly shown when Nelson was able to defeat the combined French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar, and when Pitt's successors were able to nullify and eventually destroy Napoleon's Continental Decrees and blockade.

There is no question that British, as well as English, national feelings were stirred during the long wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and they have been aroused in time of war ever since, especially when there has been a fear of invasion; but they have not usually been coupled with isolationism. On the contrary, John Bull was often depicted in Victorian cartoons as a kind of vigilante, ever ready to thrash the foreign bully.

During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, the British public first gave voice to authentic Jingoism:

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.

Of course, public opinion was not the only relevant factor in the making of foreign policy. There were also issues of principle. As we have mentioned, Lord Palmerston argued for intervention - in whichever part of the world it might be necessary - during the Don Pacifico debate in the House of Commons.

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 here to England rather than Britain; but note too that another point of view was expressed 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 important part to play here. Gladstone was Prime Minister four times, Chancellor of the Exchquer four times, and an M.P. for over 60 years. In 1850 he objected to Palmerston's linking Britain with the slave owning Roman Empire (and was therefore against intervention); 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 crushed a Christian uprising in Bulgaria with disproportionate violence (thereby suggesting that we should intervene).

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, and 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)

Salisbury did not believe in Progress either, 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 in this way: "America would now have been nicely divided into hostile states, and we should have had as little to fear from Washington as from Paris."

Salisbury also believed that the British (or rather the English) would always prevail in the worlds of commerce and industry, wherever the contest might take place. He told the House of Lords that:

> Our people, when they go into possession of a new territory, carry with them

> such a power of initiative, such an extraordinary courage and resource in the solving of new problems, that if they are pitted against an equal number - I care not what race it is, or what part of the world it is - and if you keep politics and negotiations off them, it will be our people that will be masters.

However, contrary to popular belief, the noble lord never did propose that the UK should engage in a policy of 'splendid isolation'. Indeed he explicitly argued against it. As the First Lord of the Admiraty, Lord Goschen, explained 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.

Why then was the idea of splendid isolation ever attributed to Salisbury? The key is the central importance of Germany, in the late 19th century. For centuries France had been '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. But all this had changed as a result of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, when the Prussian Army swiftly relegated France to what used to be called the Second Division. The Prussians also created a new German Empire, or *Reich*, which was rapidly recognized as the most important industrial power on the Continent of Europe, and a serious competitor to the U.K. and the U.S.A. on the world stage.

Salisbury 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, there was no conscription and the Army was relatively small. On the other hand, the larger nations of Continental Europe 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. Unable to do anything much about the size of the Army, he took steps to strengthen the Navy, overseeing 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 adopted 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 is 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.

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.

Salisbury's foreign policy was therefore far from simple, and it takes time to explain; but it did involve a certain degree of detachment from Continental

entanglements; and clearly the overwhelming supremacy of the Royal Navy in terms of size and quality played an important part in this. No wonder then, that some were inclined to latch onto the idea that Salisbury believed in splendid isolation. It is a catchy phrase, with a Jingoistic ring which appealed to the spirit of the age; but it does not tell us the whole story.

Heligoland

After Bismarck fell from power in 1890, Britain and Germany entered into the Treaty of Kiel, by which Britain ceded the tiny North Sea island of Heligoland. This became German, in a surrender of sovereignty which was unusual for Victorian Britain and surprising, in view of Salisbury's reputation for putting Britain first.

Britain had acquired Heligoland towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars. After the disastrous retreat from Moscow, the French Emperor had suffered defeat in the field for the first time and various peace agreements were signed in 1814. One of these provided for Denmark to cede Heligoland to Britain, though a general settlement had to wait for the Congress of Vienna in 1815. This saw a more widespread rearrangement of territories in Europe and around the world and, in particular, a considerable enlargement of the British Empire.

A look at the map might suggest that Heligoland was of some strategic importance. It is after all 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 none of these factors were of any great significance in 1814, because 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. The reason the British acquired Heligoland was simply because France remained the traditional enemy at the time and the island would serve to contain French naval designs on Scandinavia or German territories.

This also explains why Britain did very little with Heligoland between 1814 and 1890. Indeed she did not even bother to fortify it as a naval base - though the cost of administering the island was still criticised in Parliament. However, Heligoland did become a popular tourist resort for the German upper classes. It also attracted German-speaking artists and writers, who enjoyed the freedom of expression which was available there. These included the poets Heinrich Heine and August von Fallersleben (who wrote the lyrics for the German national anthem). Heligoland was also a refuge for radicals 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 Britain and an increasingly strong economy, began to pursue a quest for colonies and, crucially, to build an imperial fleet to rival the Royal Navy. Imperial Germany's colonial expansion caused great anxiety in Britain. In particular, her aim to link the Congo to East Africa was 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 made little progress, however, until Britain put forward a 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, which was eventually concluded in June 1890.

Ceding Heligoland to Germany was controversial in Britain, especially since it encountered opposition from Queen Victoria, who is said to have remarked that it was '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, was not a serious problem in 1890. Despite the queen's concern, the deal was done, though the Heligolanders were never consulted. (Lord Salisbury pointed out that consulting Her Majesty's subjects 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 British commentators were scathing in their descriptions of the island, which was referred to as 'a summer bathing spa for a few Germans'. Another wrote 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'; but this seems to be little more than hindsight. 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 of 1890 involved:

> 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.

Meanwhile, most German politicians were delighted with the deal. The acquisition of Heligoland removed a potential threat to their access to the North Sea and the concessions in East Africa were not large. On the other hand, though Bismarck - who at one time favoured the treaty of 1890 - changed his mind. It was

he who is 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 to suggest that the policy wasn't working; but Salisbury's real policy - of keeping on the right side of Imperial Germany - worked reasonably well until Bismarck was replaced in 1890. Thereafter, it became much more difficult to predict German intentions, since the mercurial Kaiser Wilhelm II was at the helm. Dealing with him must have been a bit like dealing with Donald Trump today. Even so, a last attempt to establish some kind of understanding between Great Britain and Germany was made in 1898 - the year when Britain and France nearly went to war as a result of a dispute concerning Fashoda on the Upper Nile.

The attempt was a failure. 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 result was an arms race, as 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 an arms race, followed by a cold war punctuated by a series of crises, and hot war in 1914.

If we were ever 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 and the Boer Republics in the interior of southern 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 was forced to adopt was hugely unpopular both at home and abroad, and Britain was treated as a pariah by the foreign press. As James Hawes has so vividly chronicled in *Englanders and Huns* (2014), the Boer War enabled the Germans to portray the British as ruthless and militaristic bullies.

The period of allegedly 'splendid isolation' came to an end in 1904, with the series of agreements between Britain and France known as the *Entente Codriale.* This put an end to various disputes between the two countries regarding their colonial empires and, in A.J.P.Taylor's words (drawn from his *Struggle for Mastery in Europe*) it 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 would be of critical importance 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 the same time; and this was 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 had 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 - which meant, 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. Eventually Balfour proscribed the Land League altogether.

It has become a tenet of liberal, as well as of Liberal, thinking that, if Home Rule had been granted to Ireland earlier, this would have avoided all the violence and bloodshed which ensued between 1916 and 1922; but it is impossible to be sure. 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. 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 also saw the failure of the reformist wing of Irish nationalism, despite three attempts by Liberal governments in Westminster 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 (though only by using the Parliament Act of 1911, which limited the powers of the House of Lords); 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. This was the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893. 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. Within four years, the League had over 400 branches. It seemed that a genuine Gaelic revival was under way.

In the Irish Nationalist version of 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 new 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 put down and several of 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 (or IRA) 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 be part of the British Empire.

A bitter civil war ensued, between pro- and anti-treaty forces within the IRA. The Free State was established in 1922, but this was not the 32 county 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.

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