Chapter Eight: Invasion and Expansion on the Isles

It is time to take a closer look at the 'multinational state' that has emerged in Britain and Northern Ireland. The history of these nations has been characterised by centuries of constant migration and this book does not pretend to understand all the complexities of the changes involved. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that since we have noted the narrative arc which traces the inseparability of England (later Britain) and mainland Europe, a further question arises. What about the arc tracing the development of the Isles themselves, and particularly the different relationship England was to have to Wales, Scotland and Ireland?

What did the Romans ever do for us?

Before discussing the different forms which English expansion into the rest of the Isles took, we should consider two invasions which are crucial to the history of the two islands when seen from an English perspective.

The first was the Roman conquest in the first century. Perhaps because of a later attempt to reproduce Rome's imperial reach themselves, there is a tendency for the English in particular to put positive spin upon their 'Roman origins.' Not only does this often mean beginning their history with the Roman occupation but it also means seeing Roman rule as a civilising mission (presumably for the Welsh as well, since Wales was also made part of Britannia) which brought wine, olive oil, togas, baths, and villas with underfloor heating, not to mention straight roads. However, the Romans stopped short of trying to civilise the 'barbarians' in the far north (hence Hadrian's wall, frequently misunderstood as representing the border between England and Scotland) or across the Irish sea.

According to this conception, the Romans are seen as realising their 'civilising' mission in the parts of the isles they occupied, leaving unmistakable traces on the generations to come (at least in England and Wales) and even falling in love with their 'adopted homeland.' The leading imperialists of the modern world found it easy to make common cause with the leading imperialists of the ancient world.[1] We can see this in Rudyard Kipling's famous poem about the Roman centurion reluctantly ordered back to Rome:

> Legate, I come to you in tears – My cohort ordered home!
> We served in Britain forty years. What should I do in Rome?
> Here is my heart, my soul, my mind – the only life I know.
> I cannot leave it all behind. Command me not to go.[2]

The story of Romans spreading civilisation wherever they went and becoming enamoured of a population that was willing to be uplifted creates the idea that some sort of cultural and social framework must have been passed on when they departed, so that England-and-Wales-to-be must have been able to preserve structures that made it superior to the rest of the Isles.

Quite apart from the way in which this approach undervalues the cultures of those the Romans chose not to 'civilise,' does it overstate the effect of Roman occupation itself on the majority of Britons in the lowland areas who spent four centuries under Roman rule? This is hard to assess. On the one hand, Peter Salway in his *History of Roman Britain* refers to the fact that by the time the Romans departed 'Britain had become so fundamentally integrated into the late Roman state that separation was fatal'.[3] Similarly, P. H. Sawyer in his *From Roman Britain to Norman England* lists many changes that came about through Roman occupation, not only the obvious ones like 'monumental architecture, well-engineered roads and regularly planned towns and farms' – the things an archaeologist can examine to this day – but less easily identifiable aspects like

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1 Davies, Norman. *The Isles: A History*, p. 126.

2 See Jones, Hayhoe and Jones, *Roman Britain*. The three editors, in a book essentially written for use in schools, have brought together a number of poems and short articles in order to give an impression of life in Roman Britain. The last section, entitled 'The Romans Leave', contains Kipling's 'The Roman centurion's song.' Essentially it conveys the idea of the imperialist falling in love with the land he occupies, a sentiment that was certainly to cause a great deal of trouble where the British Empire was concerned, because it is a large settler population that makes withdrawal from empire most difficult.

3 Salway, Peter. *A History of Roman Britain*, *pp. 354–355*.

the 'machinery of government', such as systems of assessment used for the collection of tribute, the rights and prerogatives of power, the means of exchange (coinage), law-codes, language and religion. In Sawyer's view 'the Romans did [...] impose a degree of stability on the political divisions of Britain'.[4]

On the other hand, there are other writers who have played down the Roman influence upon the parts of the Isles that they conquered, perhaps because they do not write from an 'English' perspective. 'The demise of the Roman Empire has been mourned to excess', suggests John Davies in his *History of Wales*.[5] 'Its essence was violence,' he continues, 'and its accomplishments were fundamentally second-rate. Its achievements in the world of science and technology were few; what need was there for new inventions in a society which had an abundance of slaves? Its literature and fine arts were a pale reflection of the splendours of classical Athens.'

Davies also plays down the social impact of Roman occupation upon the part of the Isles which was to become England and Wales. Unlike their counterparts in Gaul, the Romans in Britannia lived in walled towns. A hundred or so of these contained perhaps one-tenth of Britannia's population.[6] When military garrisons and a few thousand villa estates are thrown in, the total comes to no more than a quarter of the population. In Britannia, in other words, the 'Romano-British' had a sense of being a minority surrounded by the 'barbarians within.' They were effectively a gated élite. For most people living inside Britannia the Roman occupation had little effect on their lives; it was hardly the moment when 'civilisation' emerged, even in the parts of the Isles that experienced direct Roman rule.

The Romans had much less influence in Britannia than in neighbouring Gallia, where Frankish developed as a variant of Latin after they left. Indeed, much of the influence the Romans did have on Britannia was via visitors from Gaul (anticipating later French influence on English culture). When in 410 they left Britannia to its own defences, they were much more concerned about the Visigoths in Italy (Alaric sacked Rome in the same year) than about retreating from an outpost of empire acquired in a whim and managed half-heartedly. In

4 Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, p. 73.

5 Davies, John *A History of Wales*, p. 43.

6 'It is hard to see how the Romano-British could have reached more than one-fifth, or at most one quarter of the whole. The proportions are quite different than in the Empire's continental provinces.' Davies, Norman *The Isles*, p. 118.

the previous century there had been a tendency for the army to crown generals in Britannia and then set off with bands of troops to try to get them made emperor in Rome – in other words, they were looking for a passport back to 'civilisation,' whatever Kipling's centurion might have suggested! In the years before the Romans' final departure, while Honorius was trying to entrench Roman power in Britannia, there were attempts to elevate three generals to the purple, as the making of emperors was termed. One of them, Constantinus, was successful, and Honorius had to cede control of Britannia and Gaul to him. When Constantinus died, Honorius had a chance to take back control, but he settled for concentrating upon Gaul instead.[7] One might conclude that even before Alaric sacked the city, many of those in Britannia were far more interested in what was happening in Rome or even Gallia than what was happening in a northern outpost of the empire. Britain slipped from the grasp of Rome while Rome was concentrating on other things.

The Roman invasion of parts of the Isles was perhaps understood less well by Kipling than by the Polish writer Korzeniowski, better known in England as Joseph Conrad for books which he wrote in his third language, English. Conrad drew on the experiences of his native Poland, which had been parcelled out among three occupying powers for most of his life, and his experiences in the French and British merchant navies. Few people had a better insight into the imperial conquests that both affected the rest of the world and expressed themselves in terms of historical developments within Europe itself. There is a famous passage in the opening chapter of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, written at the turn of the twentieth century (1899) at roughly the same time as Kipling's tearful centurion asking not to be sent home. In the passage, Conrad's character Marlow comments as follows while sitting in a small boat on the Thames watching all the vessels pass by heading for distant outposts of the British Empire:

> I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago—the other day ..... Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine—what d'ye call 'em?—trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries—a wonderful lot of handy men they must

7 See Davies, John *A History of Wales,* p.41. At the same time 'barbarian' attacks meant a gradual movement of the centre of gravity of the Roman Empire southwards. See Salway, Peter *A History of Roman Britain*, p. 320.

> have been, too—used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here—the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina—and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages,—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death—death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh, yes—he did it…They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna by and by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a decent young citizen in a toga—perhaps too much dice, you know—coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men…[8]

Heart of Darkness focuses upon the British in Congo, but in Conrad's opening chapter the idea of imperial mission is reversed. Instead of civilisation trembling at the approach of the 'dark continent,' as all those ships left London for Congo and other parts of the British Empire, we have Romans trembling at the wet, marshy outlines of what to them might well have seemed the boondocks of their own empire. Natives with bones through their noses looking out from behind trees at the British become natives covered with woad looking out from the grim marshland at the Romans. Unmanageable jungle becomes unmanageable swamp. These Romans were not settlers happy to pass on their 'grandeur' to natives they had learned to love, but people who for one reason or another had drawn the short straw, most of whom would soon be looking for ways of returning to 'civilisation.' Perhaps they had been banished from Rome or had fallen out of favour there, but they would still dream of returning with one of their generals who, once elevated to the purple and able to depose those in power in Rome, would reward them.

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8 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Classics Edition, 2014), p. 3. The book was originally published in 1899.

Norman Davies suggests in *The Isles* that 'Britannia was neither evacuated, nor stormed, nor ceded by treaty. It was left to its own devices for a temporary period which, in the event, turned out to be permanent.'[9] So, what exactly was left behind when the Romans left? There is a well-known story, recorded by the 6th Century cleric Gildas, of how Vortigern invited the Saxons to come and protect the Romano-British and they then proved to be something of a cuckoo in the nest, an account repeated in Bede's 8th Century *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.[10] Whatever its consequences, Vortigern's policy is hardly a surprise. If he yielded land to Saxon mercenaries, then he was acting as Rome itself often did, providing land for those who would defend its borders. But it seems that the Saxons, unlike those whom the Romans had used as buffer states, started to spread themselves westwards, moving out of the coastal regions into the interior and meeting little resistance, at least in the lowlands. John Davies argues that what is striking about the Saxon colonisation of England is the way in which it differed from other forms of colonisation in Europe.[11] Unlike in Gallia, where ex-Roman forces still maintained some infrastructure, Britannia had imploded, and there was no unified resistance to invaders from abroad, some of whom were plunderers in transit and some of whom sought to settle.

In many places the so-called 'barbarians,' who are so often pictured storming the various gates of the Roman Empire, willingly adopted the culture of those they displaced. In Gaul the Gallo-Roman culture was effectively taken over by the Franks, who spoke a form of Latin that can be described as proto-French. But across the Channel the Saxons did not adopt the culture of those they displaced to the same extent. Were Roman structures perhaps less firmly established than in Gaul? That might suggest that the Romanisation of Britain was in fact rather shallow. Where the Gauls had a Gallo-Roman culture that survived the departure of the legions in a sufficiently strong form for the invaders to adopt it, the Saxons found something much less established, a Romano-British culture that was not evident throughout the country. The Saxons did not adopt it on the island. A few of the Romano-British decided that

9 Davies, Norman. *The Isles*, p. 147.

10 See the account in Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, pp. 76–91: 'Britain after the Romans'.

11 See Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 36. Davies suggests that Romanisation 'did not penetrate into the marrow of the population of Britain (and even less so that of Wales) as it did in the greater part of the Western Empire.'

the best solution was to emigrate to what is now France, creating a 'Britannia' (Brittany) which had to be distinguished from 'Great Britain' (the larger Brittany) across the water, one which could at least make use of a more established infrastructure than the chaotic world they had abandoned.

From the perspective of an empire established more than a millennium after the Roman Empire ended, it might appear that the Romans in Britannia were more like the British in India than the British in Australia or New Zealand. After they left, Britannia reverted to a state of incessant warfare – just as happened to British India, which collapsed into civil war after the British departed (not least because of the 'divide and rule' policy which had previously encouraged divisions). Celts fought Saxons, but Celts also fought Celts and Saxons fought Saxons, the whole mix constantly stirred by a chain of migrations and resettlements.

Whatever the important social and cultural developments that happened in those parts of the Isles that were never touched by the Romans, like Ireland, it is not clear that even when the Romans did occupy the land their influence was as great as has often been supposed. The most noteworthy aspect of the Roman 'heritage' in England and Wales was that it was not embedded enough to be passed on. Yet there remains an enduring tendency for the English to play up the Roman influence upon their national formation, an earlier imperial power which provided the inspiration for its successor, rather than the European influence that followed the final departure of the legions. Writing on the cusp of the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, the historian Christopher Dawson observed a tradition of education in which European nations learned about a lost world order associated with ancient Rome.[12] This applied above all, he felt, to England, where Gibbon's famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was digested alongside their own national past. As a result, the existence of Europe as a social reality was underplayed or ignored.

1066 and all what?

Unlike the Romans, the Vikings and Danes did not simply arrive in the South-East of the country. Julius Caesar might have thought in terms of crossing from

12 Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, pp. 3–20: 'How to Understand our Past.' Dawson was concerned, however, primarily with the loss of a Christian rather than a classical heritage. The text first appeared in 1952.

Gaul, but for the Vikings from further North it made sense to go to other parts of the Isles. The busiest seaway became that between what is now Ireland and what is now Wales and Scotland. The importance of the 'Celtic Mediterranean' had been insufficiently acknowledged during Roman times and in the decades after the departure of the legions. It was made even more important by the invasions from the North. The Vikings, unlike the Romans, moved into Ireland as well as modern-day Britain from the end of the eighth century, and Ireland proved an important trading-post between Scandinavia and what is now Spain. Economic activity, such as there was, became concentrated away from what is now England.[13] There was none of the present-day perspective from which nothing can match the size of London or the economic dominance of the 'home counties.'

Given the significance of both cultural interaction and trade in the West and North, there is no reason to suppose that developments in what is now Ireland, Scotland and Wales were any less significant than developments in what is now England. Yet 'British' history concentrates on the date 'everyone knows,' 1066, when the successors of Alfred succumbed to invasion. The successful Norman invasion of 1066 took place in a year which saw a scramble on several fronts for the final Viking spoils. A 'Danish' invasion force was repelled by Harold at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in the North. Meanwhile a 'Norwegian' force never arrived and then a force from Normandy overcame Harold at the Battle of Hastings. The focus had returned to the South of England.

The Normans had been moving South on the European mainland since the ninth century and had already fought a series of battles in what would now be France. King Charles III of France decided that the best way to deal with his Scandinavian squatters on the Seine when they migrated South was to adopt them. In 911 the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte ensured that they were given land (Normandy), made to accept Christian baptism and became vassals of the King.[14] They accepted feudalism and gave up Viking laws and institutions. It was a similar practice of assimilation to that seen in the case of the Gallo-Roman communities dealing with the Franks.

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13 '…in the post-Roman era the western seaways thrived. With Roman coastal defences abandoned and turmoil on the landward side, the Celtic Sea returned to its earlier function as the great open conveyer of goods, people and culture.' Davies, Norman *The Isles*, p. 175. Indeed the arrival of the Vikings intensified a process which had already begun in the post-Roman period.

14 See Davies, *The Isles*, p. 234.

Victorious though they had been against Harold in 1066, the Normans in England remained culturally and socially attached to French-speaking Normandy. They accepted that the arrangement made with Charles III a century before meant that they remained feudal vassals of the King of France. The Norman and subsequently the Plantagenet Kings did not just think 'in continental terms' because they wished to ensure that England was well-protected against external threats. They thought in such terms because this is where they kept their legal obligations and their cultural roots. They retained towns, titles and connections subordinating them to French monarchs. Every English King up to and including Edward III (in the fourteenth century) paid homage to the French King. The mainland was where their focus lay. Even in the late twelfth century, more than a century after the Norman invasion, Plantagenet Kings were only spending about one-third of their time in England. They travelled through all their lands extracting tribute from their tenants-in-chief and dealing with disputes. If this was an 'Empire', it wasn't an Empire centred upon England in the way that the British Empire was centred upon Britain or the Roman Empire upon Rome. It was centred upon Normandy. The ten-year reign of Richard the Lionheart (1189–1199) saw him spend just six months in England. Unsurprisingly, when Queen Victoria requested that the remains of the many Plantagenet Kings buried in France be returned to England, she was reminded that so far as these monarchs were concerned by having their last resting-place outside England they had merely come home![15]

Nevertheless, despite their attachment to Normandy, the Normans did begin to expand into other parts of the Isles. This was partly a defensive action.[16] They were keen to rein in some of their followers who sought independent lordships or who launched freelance operations, for instance from Wales into Ireland. By trying to keep their supporters under control they found themselves

15 Davies, *The Isles*, p. 290. It was the Prefect of Maine-et-Loire who reminded Victoria of this. The important point is that the primary attachment of the Plantagenets was to France. Davies points out that there is no evidence that they could speak a word of the English language.

16 We see here the beginnings of the idea that Scotland, Wales and Ireland, which he chooses to call 'peripheral polities,' might be used as a 'back door' by European enemies. Of course, immediately after the Norman invasion the enemies were more groups like the Marcher Lords who were ostensibly allies of the Normans. See Simms, *Britain's Europe*, p. 6 and for the Marcher Lords Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 106. The Marcher Lords had to be weak enough to be under the control of the English monarch, but strong enough to keep the lid on the Welsh to the West.

extending their range. From this perspective the Normans really wanted to concentrate on mainland Europe but found themselves drawn further and further in the other direction. The constant European attachment associated with the importance of Normandy to England's mediaeval rulers, came alongside a growing association of other parts of the Isles with military adventurism and sedition.

This perspective affected later attitudes towards different parts of the Isles. The areas left untouched by Roman 'civilisation' became, in Simms' oft-repeated imagery, the 'back door' that can never be kept secure, the 'supply store' where resources can be found for campaigns on the European mainland, a kind of tradesmen's entrance for deliveries from the wilder parts of the Isles. He quotes the writer of *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe, saying that England's considerations for uniting with Scotland in the Act of Union between the two countries in 1707 were 'peace, strength and shutting the back door of continual war and confusion from the North'.[17] The parts of the Isles away from England became a potential entry-point for foes seeking to attack. Just as the mediaeval historians who talk about Norman expansion present it as an attempt to control unruly followers like the Marcher Lords who pursued freelance operations in the 'Wild West', so the later development of the United Kingdom is presented by Simms as a way of cutting off the possibility of invasion by the back door, by Louis XIV in the case of the Union with Scotland and by Napoleon in the case of the Union with Ireland. An internal empire is developed for purely defensive reasons. The wilder edges of the isles are suppressed out of necessity and a religious gloss is thrown over their supposed backwardness by their reluctance to adopt the religious settlement that emerged with the Henrician Reformation. The un-Romanised 'outer Britain' that was only gradually brought into the fold and civilised had been turned into those in the 'Celtic fringe' who denied the Anglican establishment.

Three kingdoms, four nations

There are two things you can do with your enemies. One is to create a barrier between yourself and them; the other is to take them over and subdue them. In the case of Wales, William the Conqueror chose the former option. He did this through providing land and honours to some of his kinsmen in the 'marches,'

17 Simms, Brendan. *Britain's Europe*, p. 47.

the border areas between England and Wales which were collectively known in mediaeval Latin as the *marchia Wallia*, while the native Welsh lands to the west were considered Wales Proper (*pura Wallia*). William's kinsmen in the Welsh Marches were to become the Marcher Lords. They came from far and wide, including Flanders and Brittany. It was people from Flanders rather than England who initially gave Pembroke the reputation of being 'Little England beyond Wales.'

By the 12th Century a 'lawless frontier' was in place, where the robber barons of the Marches administered their own law as they saw fit. As the rulers of *marchia Wallia*, they were the lords of No Man's Land, or what John Davies calls 'a cordon sanitaire of Norman lordships between his (The King of England's) kingdom and the territories of the Welsh rulers.'[18] A similar creation of barriers could be observed in Scotland and Ireland. The Marches were created to keep the Welsh at bay, the lowlands of Scotland were used to keep the Highlanders at bay and the Plantagenets established the 'Pale' in Ireland to keep out those who were 'beyond the Pale.'

It was an attitude that might be compared to that of the Romans towards their borders, which were best secured not by barriers (as said, Hadrian's Wall on the Northern frontier is misunderstood if seen in these terms) but by making use of sympathetic 'barbarians' who could protect the edges of the Empire. It was not a policy without risk. Those who were installed to defend borders could prove troublesome for those on either side of them. They also tended to see themselves as superior to those they were created to manage, a view that has had echoes down the centuries. Professor Vernon Bogdanor, in a lecture given in Gresham College on the former Labour Chancellor and Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, records that when an undergraduate in Oxford the young Jenkins was thought snobbish because he liked to say that he was 'from the Marches' rather than from Wales![19]

In the case of Wales, the barrier was broken down decisively in the late thirteenth century by the English. In 1277 King Edward I mobilised not just the feudal knights of England but a mercenary army and a fleet of ships from Gascony and elsewhere across the Channel. It was the largest army to have been

18 Davies, John *A History of Wales*, p. 106.

19 The lecture was one of six given by Professor Bogdanor at Gresham College, London, on politicians who helped to shape 20th Century UK politics but never became Prime Minister. This was the third and was called 'Roy Jenkins, Europe and Civilised Society.' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dimAWlJfNOY

mobilised since the Norman invasion in 1066. It may have begun as a punitive expedition, but it soon became an invasion. Edward took not just soldiers with him but other trades, such as carpenters and stonemasons to put together the infrastructure of occupation, not to mention 360 reapers to seize the grain harvest in Anglesey. He built roads and castles which (before the age of gunpowder) were impregnable and served as bases from which his forces could ride out and hunt down 'rebels.'[20] The Edwardian castles have remained in Wales ever since as 'the magnificent badges of its subjection,' as Thomas Pennant called them.[21]

Hence, though it was in 1901 that people first began to talk of a statute passed during the reign of Henry VIII as an act of 'Union' between England and Wales, this was hardly an accurate description. Earlier invasions and the reforms passed in their wake had effectively removed anything for the English to unite with. The Welsh Act was passed by England alone, without any members from Wales; indeed, one can see this from its preamble which claimed that union between Wales and England already existed at the time of the act:

Wales…is and ever hath been incorporated, annexed, united to and subjecte to and under the imperialle Crown of this Realme as a verrye member…of the same.[22]

It was effectively an act of annexation rather than union. The Tudor reorganisation of England and Wales under Henry VIII resembled the way in which seven European powers carved out the shape of what were to become fifty African countries in the nineteenth century, without consideration of where ethnic groups were located or traditional boundaries lay. The act of 1536 made no use of Offa's Dyke, the eighth-century earth embankment designed to mark off the border with Mercia, much of which is still visible today.[23] That was a way of marking off two kingdoms, whereas what happened during the reign of Henry VIII was a way of reorganising one kingdom. As with the meandering line that later divided 'North' from 'South' in Ireland and which remains so controversial today, any border created in 1536 was not intended to mark a boundary between nations.

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20 See Davies, *A History of Wales,* pp. 151–152.

21 See Davies, *A History of Wales,* p. 167. An eighteenth century writer, Davies calls Pennant 'the most learned of the Welsh antiquarians of his age' (p. 336).

22 See the Laws of Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542, sometimes called 'Acts of Union' but this is not like the Act of Union with Scotland, being more of an annexation. See Johnes, Martin *Wales: England's Colony?: The Conquest, Assimilation and Re-creation of Wales.*

23 This is explored further below in Chapter 10, 'Home Rule for Northern Ireland?'

It was different in the case of Scotland. By the end of the seventeenth century, the need to settle the relations between England and Scotland had become crucial. As the eighteenth century dawned, the War of the Spanish Succession was making England acutely aware that it might have its own war over the succession to the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland. Scotland wanted the succession to go to the Stuarts and Louis XIV, the King of France, backed James' exiled son James III, the so-called 'Old Pretender', as the rightful heir to the throne. The heir was now a teenager and the Auld Alliance (of Scotland and France) was starting to look threatening once again.[24] In England the Act of Settlement in 1701 was passed overruling the rights of the House of Stuart for those of Hanover. However, two years later the Scottish Parliament passed its own Act of Security which claimed the right to determine the succession and not have it imposed from Westminster. An Act of Union had to be secured if there was not to be a War of the Stuart Succession.

Unlike the annexation of Wales, the Act of Union between England and Scotland was an agreement between two parliaments, one which left Scotland with a degree of autonomy denied to Wales, in terms of retaining its own legal system, its own education system and its own 'established' presbyterian church. Nairn talks of 'a nationality which resigned statehood but preserved an extraordinary amount of the institutional and psychological baggage normally associated with independence.'[25] There was intense pressure from the English, who had demonstrated that they could elbow Scotland out of the acquisition of colonies and hamper her trade with the rest of Europe. Yet this rivalry ended up making the union more likely rather than less. Scotland had designs on creating an empire overseas but lacked the means. The Scottish Parliament created the Company of Scotland in 1695 which funded a settlement to be called New Caledonia. It was a disaster. Sickness, storms and siege decimated the settlers and English governors in nearby colonies had no desire to help what at the time was a rival nation with its own imperial designs. They treated the Scots as they would the Spanish or the French. The result was a significant number of Scots willing to concede independence in return for the benefits of trade and the possibility of participating in an Empire that the resources of a combined British

24 See Simms, *Britain's Europe*, p. 47. He quotes Daniel Defoe's remark about 'shutting a back door' – that familiar image – and suggests that the Whig elites both North and South of the border were prepared to settle their differences in order to combine against Louis XIV.

25 Nairn, Tom *The Break-Up of Britain*, p. 119.

Union could manage. Scotland's willingness to support the Act of Union in 1707 was therefore linked to its abortive attempt to colonise Darien in Central America in 1698. This was the beginning of a century in which what was to become British overseas expansion took off, from the time of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 to the enormous 'gains' in India and Canada in mid-century.[26]

The Act of Union provided Scotland with the benefits (as they were believed at the time) of imperial expansion and in the following century the benefits of industrial expansion. It was a question of receiving a share of the spoils, and to this extent, despite the ways in which the English were arm-twisting their northern neighbour, a matter more of partnership than annexation. As Nairn puts it, 'during the prolonged era of Anglo-Saxon imperialist expansion, the Scottish ruling order found that it had given up statehood for a hugely profitable junior partnership in the New Rome.'[27] Arguably one can see in Scottish attitudes to England at this time an early version of the UK's attitude after the Second World War, as it also came to accept that it could no longer manage an empire and chose instead to be a junior partner of the USA.

This by no means implies that Scotland would be any less reluctant to opt for independence in the twenty-first century, when the loss of empire and industrial decline of Britain make those spoils much less alluring. In fact, some Scots would say that the 'spoils' started travelling in the opposite direction half a century ago, when England began receiving the benefits of offshore oil deposits in the 1970s, the decade when the Scottish National Party first became much stronger (campaigning under the slogan 'It's Scotland's oil') and books appeared predicting the end of the union, like Tom Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain*, first published in 1977. Partly influenced by this decline of Britain, a number of books appeared over the next two decades exploring Scottish identity.[28]

Scotland has a stronger sense, as Bogdanor puts it, that the Act of Union sets down certain parameters within which the new British parliament must operate.[29] Scotland is particularly aware of limitations to the idea of Parlia-

26 See the first part of 'The British Imperial Isles,' Chapter 9 of Norman Davies, *The Isles*, pp. 553–584.

27 Nairn, Tom *The Break-Up of Britain*, p. 119.

28 For instance, David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Shaw (eds) *The Making of Scotland: Nature, Culture and Social Change*, which appeared in 1989 and David McCrone's *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation, which appeared in 1992*.

29 See Bogdanor, *Beyond Brexit: Towards a British Constitution*, esp. the chapter 'Brexit and Devolution: The Future of the United Kingdom'.

ment's sovereignty, not least because the Scottish Parliament preceding the Act of Union was never fully sovereign (some in Scotland claim that the idea of loyalty to the Scottish Parliament was merely conditional goes back to the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320) and therefore was not in a position to give its sovereignty away to the new British Parliament. At the very least it could be taken to suggest that the Act simply meant that Scottish representatives were admitted to the parliament of England. Moreover, the idea that parliamentary sovereignty means that Westminster can do what it likes appears to clash with the explicit agreement at the time of the Act of Union that in certain respects Scotland could go its own way. It retained its own legal, educational and religious system under the 1707 Act of Union. From a Scottish perspective, these constraints agreed upon at the time of the Act of Union must necessarily mean that the new British Parliament can't do what it likes where cultural and legal arrangements north of the border are concerned. However, no machinery has been established in order to enforce this or to work through, in detail, how it can be squared with the idea of parliamentary sovereignty. In practice, the new British parliament passed, for instance, certain laws concerning the Presbyterian church that might have been challenged for being unconstitutional on the grounds that such matters could be decided by Scotland alone. This is a situation in which a degree of sovereignty-sharing can not only help to strengthen a British Union post-Brexit but help to formalise the Act of Union through which England and Wales first joined with Scotland to form Great Britain.

Scotland's willingness to support the Act of Union in 1707 was linked, as we have seen, to its abortive attempt to colonise Darien in Central America in 1698. A rival was cajoled into becoming a partner. In the case of Ireland, it was different. Simms suggests that the same concern for French exploitation of the 'back door' at the time of Napoleon led to a further Act of Union in 1800, drawing Ireland into Britain by merging the Parliaments.[30] Thus, Napoleon forced Britain and Ireland together, just as a century earlier Louis XIV had forced England and Scotland together. But if so, they were forced together in very different ways.

From the time of the Hanoverian succession in 1714 all Kings of Britain were automatically Kings of Ireland, but here there was no sense of participation either in the spoils of empire or (after the mid-eighteenth century) the benefits of the industrial revolution. There was no equivalent in Ireland outside Ulster, where what Peter Gibbon calls 'the great industrial triangle of the valleys of the

30 Simms, *Britain's Europe*, p. 112.

Mersey, the Clyde and the Lagan'[31] helped to set what was to become Northern Ireland apart and created a strongly unionist working class. Ireland remained a country whose economy was based on agriculture.

The Irish were not only kept from industrialising, they did not have control of the agriculture to which they were largely confined. Absentee landowners enjoyed the profits from the land and determined how it would be administered. Though its population grew in the eighteenth century, rising from about two million to four by the end of the century, most of them were very poor, housed in little cottages called 'cabins' – the word an indication of how cramped they were.[32]

Hence, when in 1800 a further Act of Union created a United Kingdom of Britain and Ireland, it was hardly an invitation to Ireland to share in the benefits of industrial and imperial expansion. As with Scotland, this further Act of Union reaffirmed the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament and ignored the pre-Union Irish Parliament's repudiation of it, later taken up by Irish Repeal movements. Yet though Scotland, like Ireland, was confronted by the supremacy of the Westminster parliament and was also a country whose people overwhelmingly rejected Anglicanism, and though it also suffered a measure of economic oppression from England itself, for instance at the time of the so-called highland clearances, its economy did benefit from the industrial revolution. Scotland was partner as well as victim when it came to English expansion. Ireland was never more than a victim.

Religion was a crucial ingredient in the way Ireland was never drawn into partnership with Britain even after it became part of the UK. In the nineteenth century the Irish could no more control the churches they might have expected

31 Nairn, Tom *The Break-Up of Britain*, p. 224. The original article by Peter Gibbon was published in New Left Review, I/55 May/June 1969 and was entitled 'Dialectic of Religion and Class in Ulster'.

32 Arthur Young, in his famous *A Tour in Ireland 1776–1779*, described Irish dwellings in the following terms (pp. 25–6): 'The cottages of the Irish, which are all called cabbins, are the most miserable looking hovels that can well be conceived: They generally consist of only one room: mud kneaded with straw is the common material of the walls; these are rarely above seven feet high, and not always above five or six; they are about two feet thick, and have only a door, which lets in light instead of a window, and should let the smoke out instead of a chimney, but they had rather keep it in especially when the cabbin is not built with regular walls, but supported on one, or perhaps on both sides by the banks of a broad dry ditch.' They remained in this state for much of the nineteenth century.

to worship in than the fields they cultivated. The established Anglican church maintained control over these, while the mostly Catholic inhabitants were forced to worship in fields through so-called 'hedge masses'. Scotland had a different brand of Christianity to the Anglicans too, but its established Kirk had a degree of recognition that the Catholic Church in Ireland did not have. Technically, the present monarch may not be a Catholic, but attends Presbyterian church services when in Scotland and is duty-bound to protect that Church under the terms of the Act of Union.

More than that, Ireland could be treated more as a colony ripe for settlement than as a part of the UK ripe for development. An earlier example of this approach, but one with huge significance in later centuries, was the so-called 'plantation of Ulster.' Though with English supervision, this was carried out by Scots. At the start of the seventeenth century Ulster was the most Gaelic, Catholic and traditional province in Ireland. Its nature was radically changed by 'plantations.' It became an equivalent to Massachusetts which was created for a similar reason, to maintain a 'purer' religion than that which was practised in the home country.[33] The Puritans who travelled away from Plymouth on the Mayflower in 1620 were looking for a 'new Eden' away from bishops and what they saw as other Anglican compromises with papacy. The Scots who went to Ulster in the earlier part of James I's reign were similarly looking to escape the impositions of Anglican rule on Presbyterian Scotland and sought to implant their idea of a pure form of Protestantism. Norman Davies reminds us that:

> The Ulster Plantation was planned at exactly the same time as the third attempt to plant a colony in Virginia. Derry, renamed Londonderry, was to be the Irish Jamestown. The native Irish were to play the same part as the native Americans.[34]

And since the Irish were meant to play the role of 'Red Indians,' as the native Americans were called, they were treated as such. When they rose up and killed 2,000 settlers in 1641, this was seen as a 'native uprising' and ruthlessly put down.

Davies describes the way in which the new settlers organised their lives:

33 See Davies, *The Isles,* pp. 478–482.

34 Davies, *The Isles*, p. 479.

> From the outset, therefore, the new settlers of Ulster operated a system of social and cultural apartheid. The principal leaseholders were usually English servitors, that is, former soldiers or crown servants, but the mass of tenants were preponderantly Scots. They built neat new towns and villages of timber-framed or stone cottages, which they fortified like frontier posts and adorned with English names…. They built their own churches … they cleared the land, cut down the forests, and applied themselves to arable farming on a scale never seen before and they rapidly organised a prosperous trade in timber, cattle and flax. They had no contact with the native Irish except those who worked for them as labourers or servants…[35]

It is a description which might be replicated in terms of many overseas settlements. The same distance from the 'natives', except in so far as they are needed as servants, the same creation of secure, fortified compounds designed as if they were being built back at home. And eventually the same question that arose in all those colonies which it was difficult to leave because they had so many settlers, such as Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and South Africa. In this sense it was not difficult to link the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Ian Smith in Rhodesia in the 1960s, where the white settlers in the future Zimbabwe declared that they were now the rulers, with the carving out of a slice of Ireland in 1922, comprising six of the traditional nine counties of Ulster and saying that they should be cut off from the rest of the island and run by the Protestant majority in that particular part of it. If one tries to imagine how, in 1922, the UK was able to accept the loss of one-third of its territory – more than Germany was forced to lose after its defeat in the First World War – the reason lies in the fact that what became the Irish Free State was seen more as a colony or dominion demanding independence than as a part of the UK precipitating a civil war. As Robert Skidelsky put it:

> historians mislead if they also see 1916 (the date of the Easter Rising) as the start of the dissolution of the British state. Ireland was part of the empire, Scotland was not.[36]

35 Davies, Norman. *The Isles*, p. 480.

36 Skidelsky *Britain since 1900: a success Story?* pp. 180–181. See also Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture.*

The dynastic umbrella

The UK as a multinational state has hardly emerged in any smooth or logical manner. It has instead been created by successive unions, each one taking a different form. Over a century ago Seeley's standard textbook referred to *The Expansion of England*,[37] and in the twentieth century many continued to see it in those terms, including the great social historian George Macaulay Trevelyan in his *History of England*, seeing English expansion as partly a mission to bring the 'Celtic fringe; into the embrace of 'civilisation'.[38] This is partly why the Scottish reference to themselves as 'North Britain' after the Union of 1707 never found a response in England, for if they were to call themselves 'South Britain' it would undermine the idea of England simply spreading itself into other parts of the Isles. Others have stressed the importance of the Protestant religion in building a Union, but apart from the fact that this could only apply to Britain, Protestantism took very different forms in Britain itself, whether Welsh nonconformity, Scottish Presbyterianism or the Church of England. Somewhere at the back of this idea may be the idea of a liberalising Protestant Spirit that swept through the land, but there was nothing very liberalising about some of the forms which Protestantism took in the Isles or in the way in which the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800 failed to introduce Catholic emancipation, which had been promised. Norman Davies goes so far as to deny that the United Kingdom has ever been a nation-state at all, although of course it depends on how you define the term. It remains essentially, he argues, a dynastic conglomerate. His view is that it is what became the British monarchy that provides an umbrella to cover a multiplicity which contains no unified legal system, no centralised education system, no common religion (the Act of Union enshrined that England and Scotland went their different ways in these three areas) and no common history.[39]

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37 Seeley, *The Expansion of England* was published in 1883, at the height of Empire.

38 Trevelyan's *History of England* came out in 1926. For analysis of this way of thinking see Colls, *Identity of England*.

39 This is his conclusion in one of his most interesting books, *Vanished Kingdoms*, which examines lands that have failed to survive, or have been transformed out of recognition, like the former USSR. Davies believes 'that the United Kingdom will collapse is a foregone conclusion' (p. 679). He is arguably too influenced by what he sees as other empires trying and failing to decentralise like Austria-Hungary. See *Vanished Kingdoms*, pp. 679–685.

A famous case from the year that Elizabeth II was crowned, *MacCormick v Lord Advocate*, considered whether Queen Elizabeth should be known as Elizabeth II in Scotland when the nation had no Elizabeth I. The court dismissed the case, but the point about the role of the monarch as part of the glue holding the UK together (Elizabeth I, of course, was no more Queen of the UK than she was Queen of Scotland) is illustrated by these concerns at the time of her coronation. Seventy years on, no one could have failed to notice how the carefully choreographed and long-drawn-out obsequies after the death of Elizabeth II took in each of the 'four nations' in turn. Once the British monarchy had lost real power, it was able to exercise symbolic power. It took until the latter half of Victoria's reign before, as Cannadine argues, the ceremonial existed 'to exalt the crown above the political battle, to that Olympus of decorative, integrative impotence which it was later to occupy'.[40]

Cannadine points out that where other countries in the late nineteenth century (for instance Russia) were still parading ritual in order to exalt royal power, in the UK such ritual was made possible by growing royal weakness. The monarch moved from being the head of society in the early nineteenth century, part of an aristocratic elite that moved around in horse-drawn carriages, to being the head of the nation at the end of the century and even the head of the empire. Disraeli made Victoria Empress of India in 1877 and twenty years later Joseph Chamberlain roped in colonial premiers and 'exotic' representatives of different parts of the empire to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

The monarch was still in a horse-drawn carriage while the rest of the population had moved to bicycles and, to a growing extent, buses and even private motor-cars. But this was what made royal ritual so popular and gave it a 'fairy-tale' quality which endured through the twentieth century and the transformation of the Empire into a Commonwealth:

> In the world of the aeroplane, the tank and the atomic bomb, the anachronistic grandeur of horses, carriages, swords and plumed hats was further enhanced.[41]

Yet even if the UK was increasingly held together by its royal sovereign in the manner of the Habsburg Empire of Austria-Hungary, the fate of that empire alone would show that it needed to develop more than a line of imported

40 See David Cannadine's chapter in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 101–165. The quotation is on p. 116.

41 Hobsbawm and Ranger, The *Invention of Tradition*, p. 143.

monarchs to maintain the identity of a multinational state. It is noteworthy that when Elizabeth II died in 2022, many commentators fixated on the possibility of the former 'dominions' following Barbados in the direction of declaring themselves republics, rather than addressing the question of how far Charles III would be a less effective head of the British Union than his predecessor.[42] A more careful analysis of the prolonged funeral celebrations, with the carefully stage-managed visits of Charles to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, would suggest that it is not Jamaica that is a source of concern to those who fear for the future role of the monarchy but nations closer to home – indeed the nature of home itself.

Conclusion

The chapter began by looking at the way English self-perception has been affected by two invasions. In the first place there is the Roman invasion, about the significance of which there remains some argument, both about the extent to which it was a 'civilising' mission and the extent to which, even if it was, it had a significant effect on the lives of most Britons. There are those who think that the most noteworthy aspect of the Roman 'heritage' in England and Wales was that, unlike in Gaul, it was not embedded enough to be passed on.

The second invasion, the Norman conquest of 1066, attached England to the continent, as Chapter Two sought to emphasise in terms of the continuing importance of mainland Europe to British identity and affairs. But in doing so, it led to a shift of focus to the South of England and the idea that expansion to the rest of the Isles was a defensive manoeuvre to ensure that the less 'developed' parts of the Isles did not provide a platform for rebellion or further invasions.

The chapter suggested that the narrative arc through which the British Union was built up took different forms in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The suggestion of annexation in the case of Wales, partnership in the case of Scotland and colonisation in the case of Ireland is an over-simplification,[43] but it

42 The BBC produced a report on 13th September 2022 under the headline 'Will Jamaica now seek to "move on" and become a republic?' See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-62846653

43 Though not, perhaps, too much of an over-simplification. Note Brendan O'Leary's trilogy on Northern Ireland, whose volumes are entitled 'Colonialism', 'Control' and

at least points up the different ways in which the United Kingdom was put together. The result is that the Isles are now made up of two nation states, one of which is a conglomerate or 'multinational state,' to give it the description used by Vernon Bogdanor, comprising four different parts that have been variously described as nations (or the 'home nations'), countries, regions and principalities.[44] 'Conglomerate' might not be a very attractive word, but it needs to be pointed out that 'the United Kingdom' (which has to be spelt out on passports as 'The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland') is a wordy description which would befit a conglomerate. It has been argued that there is little to unite it beyond the symbolic power of the monarchy, which is itself subject to change now that Elizabeth II is dead. The death of Elizabeth might help to make clear that the UK needs to go further than relying on the symbolic power of monarchy in order to maintain its unity as a single nation-state.

'Consociation,' the last a new term to add to the list of possible ways forward for governing the Isles.

44 See his *Beyond Brexit: Towards a British Constitution*.