Part I

Nations, Lands, Peoples

This is a history of the island of Great Britain and of its remarkable impact on the world in the century and a half after 1688. That may sound like a straightforward place to begin, but in fact it is not. In 1688, Great Britain was not a nation or a state – it was a geographical expression, identifying the biggest of a group of islands on the west coast of Europe. The island called Great Britain was made up of two kingdoms with one king, an awkward state of affairs. It encompassed many different regions and peoples. "Britishness," the national characteristics of a British people, did not yet exist. People thought of themselves as English or Welsh or Scots (not Scotch, which is the name of an alcoholic drink). To make matters more complicated, by the end of the period, the national state that we will be studying was no longer officially called Great Britain. After 1801, it was the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. These changes have left a legacy of linguistic confusion that persists today. People often say "British" when they mean "English," or mention "Britain" when they mean "the United Kingdom." Since there is no simple term for an inhabitant of the United Kingdom, some degree of confusion is probably inevitable; but it is worth sorting out, as much as we can, what Britain was, and what it became, in terms of nations, lands, and peoples.

If the British nation is a recent creation, as the first chapter of this part of the book will argue, the settlement of the land is not. The British Isles have been populated for thousands of years, and large sections of them have been under cultivation for twenty centuries or more. In the 1500s, however, a more intense type of land use began in some areas of southern England. This would lead to higher agricultural productivity and, eventually, lower food prices. New methods of farming also encouraged the creation of a labor force that could be employed, whether out of necessity or from choice, in spinning and weaving cloth, as well as in other industrial pursuits. English and Scottish towns, many of which had been in a state of decline in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, became commercially prosperous again, and trade expanded rapidly. The rich got richer, while the

poor mostly had to wait until the late seventeenth century before they began to feel the beneficial effects of an expanding economy. These subjects are considered in the second chapter below.

The peoples of Great Britain are the subject of the third chapter. What were their numbers? How similar were they to us, in values or ideas? What differences existed between men and women, rich and poor? What did people do when they were not working? It is often hard to put the many answers to these questions into a broader pattern. Was life improving? Was it becoming more "modern," and if so, what do we mean by that term? Readers should understand that much of the material in the second and third chapters of this part of the book is generalized and that the interpretations are often controversial. Economic and social historians have engaged in almost as many arguments about this period as political ones. They are divided by when developments began, how they should be described, and how important they were. Almost everyone who has written on the period from 1500 to 1700, however, agrees that big changes were under way in every aspect of British life. What follows is an overview of how those changes came about, and what they meant.

1

Nations and Kingdoms

Nations are not natural formations: they are the products of historical processes. How were the nations of England and Scotland shaped in the centuries before 1660? In answering that question, we have to take some account of Ireland as well, because its history intersected with that of the other two kingdoms. The nations of the British Isles developed as a result of invasions, internal conflicts, the Protestant Reformation, and a bitter series of Civil Wars in the mid-1600s. From the eleventh century onwards, England was the most powerful and aggressive kingdom in the British Isles. Its imperial adventures in Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, and the New World played a central role in nation-building. Constant wars against its neighbors built up a sense of English identity, as well as stimulating reactions from other peoples and kingdoms.

Ancient Invaders

The British Isles is an archipelago of islands on the northwest coast of Europe. The two biggest of them are Great Britain and Ireland, although it should not be forgotten that a number of smaller islands surround them – the Isle of Wight, Anglesey, the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, Orkneys, and Arran Islands, among others. Until the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, Great Britain was not an island at all, but an extension of the European continent. It was inhabited before the glaciers came down from the north for the last time, and as the great sheets of ice receded, the people came back. They established a series of Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures on the British Isles, whose most lasting achievements were the building of great stone circles and megalithic tombs. The stone circle at Stonehenge in England and the enormous chambered tomb at Newgrange in Ireland are the most famous. The early islanders did not live in isolation; they continued to have strong links with the rest of Europe, judging by the recent discovery at Stonehenge of the body of an archer who was identified as Swiss by the chemical composition of his teeth.

The *keltoi* or Celts (a Greek word for people who called themselves Gauls or Gaels) reached the islands around 600 BCE. They were migrants from Eastern Europe, who eventually settled in places across the continent, from Turkey to Spain. It is now generally believed that they infiltrated rather than invaded the British Isles, mixing with existing populations but not displacing them. People who claim today to be "pure Celts" may therefore be a little misled – leaving aside later additions, their ancestors were more likely a mixture of Celtic and pre-Celtic peoples. The Celtic priests, known as druids, were glamorized in the eighteenth century by historians, who embraced them, wrongly, as proto-Christians, although they actually worshipped a variety of gods. Much later, the druids were turned into nature worshippers by twentieth-century New Age believers who still gather yearly at Stonehenge (in fact, it is a pre-druidic shrine) to celebrate the summer solstice. The real Celts were fierce warriors and skilled metalworkers who traded tin to the Mediterranean, where they were known to Greek-speaking merchants as "Priteni" or Britons. In Ireland, they established a high kingship that lasted, with one major break, until the twelfth century CE, although it was not strong enough to unite the island.

The invasion of Great Britain by the Romans in 43 CE broke up the Celtic world of the British Isles. The province of Britannia, which remained under Roman rule for the next four centuries, was almost coterminous with the later English kingdom. Wales and Cornwall were never entirely subdued by the Roman legions, and the northern part of Great Britain, inhabited by a mysterious people known as the Picts, was conquered only briefly. Ireland remained outside the Roman Empire. The inhabitants of Scotland and Ireland nonetheless traded a great deal with the Romans, and were deeply affected by Roman culture, especially Roman Christianity, but it was only in England that the two cultures merged, at least among the upper classes. In time, Britannia was integrated into a Europe-wide Roman world based on commerce, cities, straight roads, and uniform imperial administration. Although that world eventually fell apart, its legacy would be revived among later inhabitants of the former province of Britannia. From then until the decline of Latin in the twentieth century, educated people in England and Scotland would tend to regard themselves as having more in common with classical civilization than with the "barbarism" of their Celtic neighbors.

The Romans withdrew from Britannia in 410 CE amidst a wave of invasions. Eventually, Germanic peoples from northern Europe, known today as "Anglo-Saxons" – actually, Angles, Saxons, Frisians, and Jutes – conquered the Romanized Britons, in spite of the resistance of the legendary military leader later celebrated as King Arthur. The Anglo-Saxons, like the Celts, did not wipe out the peoples that they had overcome, but they remained apart from the Britons in their laws and customs, and they drove the Celtic languages into Wales ("welsh" meant foreigner in Anglo-Saxon) and Cornwall. It took the invaders a long time to accept Christianity, which was already widespread among the native British population. The Christian religion had taken a firm hold in Ireland, and was reintroduced to northern Britain by Irish missionaries, while missionaries from Rome reconverted the south. Meanwhile, a line of Irish kings from Dalriada, which straddled northern Ireland and the Scottish islands, gained control over the northern Pictish lands,

Map 1   *Counties of Great Britain and Ireland. (Source: Thomas William Heyck,* The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History, *volume 2: 1688–1870, 3rd edn, Chicago, 2008.)*

which they renamed Scotia. The southern parts of Scotland fell under the sway of the kingdom of Northumbria, principal realm of the Angles, who would give their name to Angle-land or England. Here were the origins of a distinction between the Gaelic speaking Scottish Highlands and the English speaking Scottish Lowlands.

The Anglo-Saxons were followed by a second wave of invaders, this time from Scandinavia. The Vikings who sailed to the British Isles from Scandinavia between the ninth and the twelfth centuries are often remembered simply as murderous pirates, but they were also settlers and traders, who revitalized London and founded the city of Dublin. They landed in large numbers in the western islands of Scotland and set up a virtually independent lordship. Resistance to them rallied under Brian Boru in Ireland and King Alfred of Wessex in southwest England, both of whom became nationalist icons in modern times. The kingdom of England emerged in the tenth century through the unification, under Alfred's successors, of the Anglo-Saxon and Viking parts of the old Roman province of Britannia. Closely allied with the Catholic Church, the English monarch ruled over a violent land in which peasants were increasingly losing their freedom to powerful lords who offered them protection in return. To help recruit local military forces, the Anglo-Saxon kings divided their realm into shires or counties, which still exist. Each county would eventually have its own administrators and courts, set up on the same model throughout the kingdom. Such a degree of uniformity in local government was highly unusual in medieval Europe. Meanwhile, the Church had divided England and Wales into dioceses, each under the authority of a bishop, and parishes where priests held religious services for local people. The same hierarchical structure was not fully established in the Church of Scotland until the twelfth century.

It was a descendant of the Vikings, the French-speaking Duke William of Normandy, who crushed the Anglo-Saxons at the battle of Hastings in 1066 and established a dynasty of strong rulers that would keep England united. William's descendants (admittedly, not very direct ones) still hold the English throne today. The Norman knights rode on to subdue the eastern and southern parts of Wales, which were divided up into "marcher lordships," and to defeat repeated invasions by the King of Scotland. The Normans also moved into the southern parts of Scotland, where they were granted land by the King of Scots. Everywhere they went, the followers of Duke William built mighty castles and strengthened the authority of lords over peasants. The Normans did not invent the manor, the basic unit of territorial lordship, or serfdom, by which a peasant could not move off the land, and paid in hard work for a lord's protection. However, they extended the manorial system (often referred to by the misleading term "feudalism") wherever they made conquests.

The Medieval English Empire

Over the next two centuries, Norman-French Kings of England founded an empire whose heartland was actually in western and southern France, but which extended throughout the British Isles. The great King Henry II, who spent most of his time

in France, extended this empire to its height. He made the King of Scotland his vassal, and in 1169 his "marcher lords" launched an invasion of Ireland. Henry's son King John suffered severe setbacks when he lost Normandy and had to grant the famous Magna Carta or Great Charter to his barons in 1215. It insured them certain legal and political rights, in terms vague enough to be interpreted much more broadly later. John's successors, however, never gave up the idea that they could only achieve greatness by putting back together the empire of Henry II. The independent kingdom of north Wales was conquered by King Edward I in the 1280s, a new principality of Wales was created, and huge castles were constructed to ensure that it would remain subdued. Scotland was also invaded and temporarily subjected, but its independence was re-established by the victory of Robert Bruce over an English army at Bannockburn in 1314. We should not interpret these wars in national terms: Robert Bruce was the descendant of Norman-French nobles, and he defeated a king whose dynasty was also Norman-French. Irish, Scottish, and Welsh peasants could hardly have cared much who their overlord happened to be, so long as he did not try to change their everyday lives. The Normans did in fact attempt to alter traditional laws in northern Wales and Ireland, but they were not very successful. Nevertheless, the fight to establish the hegemony of the King of England would give rise to the idea that there were fundamental national differences between the peoples that inhabited the British Isles. As in later times, empire and national identity went hand-in-hand.

After 1337, the Kings of England turned their attention to the restoration of their former domains in France. Thus began the so-called 100 Years' War, which lasted on and off until the English lost Calais, their final toehold in France, in 1558. In many ways, the war marked the flourishing of an English national consciousness, that is, awareness of being English rather than part of a Norman-French civilization. This may have started earlier among clerical chroniclers, but it now spread to the knights, who while mostly Norman-French in origin, were engaged in fighting the French, and began to see themselves as different from their enemies. They modeled themselves on the mythical British knights of King Arthur's Round Table. By the end of the 1300s, English rather than French was being taught in schools to the children of the upper classes. An English literature was emerging, whose greatest early figure was the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, author of the *Canterbury Tales*. Differences between the Scots and English went back further, but since the Scots were now allies of the French, the English upper classes saw themselves as separate from their northern neighbors as well, in spite of the fact that the Stewart kings who ruled Scotland after 1371 were descendants of Norman knights.

Another factor in creating national consciousness was Parliament. In seeking funds and support for making war against the Welsh, the Scots, and the French, the King of England found it useful to call a grand council of nobles, high ranking clergymen and representatives of counties and towns. The representatives were chosen by those who owned land, by town magistrates, and in some cases by wider groups of electors who enjoyed privileges in specific localities. Later, the nobles and clergy formed a House of Lords, while the representatives became a

House of Commons. The Parliament, or place to speak (*parler* in French), was not a democratic body, but it soon claimed that it spoke for the whole English nation, which supposed of course that such a nation existed.

At the same time, however, the power of the English nobles over the Welsh, the Irish, and the English peasantry was diminishing. This was partly due to a factor over which no noble and no king had any control: the bubonic plague or Black Death, which devastated the British Isles and most of Europe in 1348–50. It may have killed off one-third of the population of the islands. The sudden death of so many people was no doubt horrifying, but it meant that the remaining peasants were in short supply. It was no longer possible to keep them on the land as serfs; instead, they became free laborers. In fact, the old manorial system had probably been declining for some time before the Black Death, which merely gave it a final blow. As a result, attempts to reduce the Irish and Welsh peasantry to serfdom, or to colonize Ireland and Wales with English settlers, fizzled out. The Norman bid to control Ireland had been going awry in any case. With the attention of the English King focused on France, the Anglo-Norman lords of southern and western Ireland became like little kings within their domains. To safeguard their power, they were compelled to adapt to Irish conditions, rather than trying to force Norman-French culture on the Irish. The Irish Parliament, which was older than the English one but represented only the Norman and English settlers, became virtually independent. In Northern Ireland, the Gaelic lordships of the O'Neills and O'Donnells reconsolidated their power. A similar situation prevailed in the principality of Wales, where the "marcher lords" maintained an uneasy authority. In 1400, Owain Glyn Dŵr was proclaimed as Prince of Wales by some local nobles, and raised a rebellion against the King of England that went on for 14 years. Glyn Dŵr even called a Welsh Parliament. The effective beginnings of a Welsh national identity can be traced to the years of Glyn Dŵr's rebellion.

The Protestant Reformations

The long war against France weakened the internal government of England as well, because it made the King very dependent on the support of his nobles. This encouraged civil wars and usurpations. The crown was taken by force on five occasions: by Henry, Duke of Lancaster (Henry IV), in 1399; by Edward, Duke of York (Edward IV), in 1461 and again in 1470; by Richard, Duke of Gloucester (Richard III), who put aside and may have murdered his nephews, the lawful heirs, in 1483; and by Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond (Henry VII), in 1485. This was a very bad record of usurpation by any standard, and it gained the English a reputation for having unsteady government. The last four of these incidents occurred during the baronial conflicts that were later known as the Wars of the Roses, which were sparked off by English defeats in France. The old Norman-French dream of an empire encompassing the British Isles and western France was now falling apart, externally and internally. Would the kingdom of England fall apart with it?

It might have, if the Scots had been strong enough to launch a successful invasion; but they were not strong enough, in spite of serious attempts in 1460, 1513, and 1542. The King of Scotland had his own worries at home, especially in controlling the Lords of the Isles, who governed the Hebrides and the west coast of Scotland, and who conspired with England to maintain their independence. King James IV finally forced the Lord of the Isles to forfeit his title in 1493. The Scots Parliament declared the Lord of the Isles a traitor, but the legislature was rarely so useful to the crown. It sat in a single chamber (not two as in England), and it was dominated by the great Scottish nobles. Such an assembly was not likely to give the King much financial support against his eternally feuding subjects. King James V began to strengthen royal control over money and justice, but he also had to fend off the English, which led him to depend heavily on an alliance with France. He died, like his father and his great-grandfather before him, in the midst of an unsuccessful war against England.

The Tudor dynasty came to the English throne in 1485, at the end of the Wars of the Roses. The Tudors did not exactly save the kingdom from ruin – it was already on the road to recovery – but they were able to rebuild English power and prestige after a century of disasters. More than any other line of monarchs, they are connected with the flowering of an English national identity. They were the first rulers since 1066 whose ancestors were not primarily Norman-French, which led them to describe themselves as natives, although the Tudor family was Welsh, not English, and it owed its questionable right to the throne to a tenuous link with the old Norman-French ruling house. The Tudors spoke of England as an empire, and they backed up their words by incorporating Wales into the kingdom (1536–43), converting the "marcher lordships" of the borderlands into English-style counties. They also intervened in Irish affairs, uniting that country to the English crown in 1541. From then until Ireland became a Republic in 1949, the King of England was also the King in Ireland. Seeking to restore English fortunes in France as well, Henry VII and his son Henry VIII fought wars against the French. These conflicts ended in defeat or bankruptcy, but they restored a sense of English prestige. In the mid-sixteenth century, the Tudors fought constant wars, usually successful, against the Scots. They used the English national Parliament to support their projects, which made the nation's representatives into their (mostly willing) partners. Most important of all, they created a separate English Protestant Church that claimed to be virtually the only true Christian church remaining on earth.

The English Protestant Reformation started because Henry VIII – the most fascinating, magnificent, and repulsive of Tudor monarchs – wanted to divorce the first of his six wives, but it soon went far beyond what the King had intended. Henry favored a conservative Reformation, one that would give him personal supremacy over the Church of England by removing the authority of the Pope, but would not change religious ceremonies and practices beyond what was necessary. By the time the King died in 1547, however, the Church and the government were full of Protestant reformers who wanted a religion in which salvation was based on faith in God alone and not linked to confession, communion, or any other works, no matter how good they might be. This was the essence

of Protestantism, a movement that had recently begun in Germany. The reformers were encouraged by Henry's son, Edward VI (King 1547–53), but they were persecuted by his daughter, Mary I (Queen 1553–8), a Roman Catholic who was the first woman to rule England as Queen. The Protestants seemed finally to be victorious after Mary died in 1558, and was succeeded by Henry's younger daughter, Elizabeth I. The Elizabethan settlement of the Church was based on a Parliamentary Act of Uniformity, 52 Royal Injunctions, and a new Book of Common Prayer (all dating from 1559), but it did not fully satisfy the most zealous reformers, because it maintained certain religious practices that were associated by them with Catholicism. On one hand, the strictly Protestant 39 Articles of Faith, accepted by an assembly of the Church in 1563, presented salvation as a matter of faith alone, and praised the "sweet and unspeakable comfort" of the Protestant doctrine of predestination, by which God determined in advance those who were to be saved. On the other hand, priestly robes or vestments were retained in the Church, as were some Catholic rituals like bowing before the communion table.

In spite of its internal contradictions, the founding of the Church of England was a turning point in the creation of national consciousness. From now on, English Protestants could see themselves as God's chosen people, unique among all the peoples of the world. The burning of Protestants by Elizabeth's sister and predecessor, Queen Mary, was now denounced as an act of horrible cruelty, and was to be remembered for centuries by avid readers of the *Book of Martyrs*, a lavishly illustrated compilation of Catholic crimes written by the clergyman John Foxe. The enemies of Protestantism – particularly, the Catholic Spaniards, French, and Irish – were seen as the enemies of God. They were labeled by Protestants as superstitious and cruel on account of their religious beliefs, which in the Irish case merely worsened an existing stereotype of barbarism and backwardness. Later, aspects of these descriptions would be transferred to peoples around the world whose cultures differed from those of the English. Not surprisingly, the great victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, which was due as much to the weather as to English seamanship, was hailed by Protestants as a divine deliverance. So was the defeat of a rebellion by the Irish Gaelic chiefs, the O'Neills and O'Donnells, at the battle of Kinsale in 1601. It was evident to the Protestant English what nation God favored.

By the time the battle of Kinsale was won, Queen Elizabeth I was venerated by many of her Protestant subjects as the preserver of true religion. Many people even today consider her to have been the greatest of all English monarchs. Her reign had seen a flourishing of national literature, including the early career of the great playwright and poet, William Shakespeare. Elizabeth's rulership, however, had limits. She had more or less given up the idea of restoring an English empire in France, and the efforts of her subjects to colonize parts of the New World had ended in failure. The financial situation of the crown was far from secure, which had led to frequent confrontations with Parliament, especially in times of war. The Armada victory, however, bestowed an aura of divine approval on Elizabeth's final years.

If the Reformation created a new sense of what it meant to be English, it had much the same effect on Scottish identity. As in England, however, religious reform

also became the source of deep divisions. The Scottish Reformation was promulgated not by the crown, but by the Parliament of 1560, which abolished the Catholic Mass and ended the authority of the Pope. This was largely a reaction against the crown's pro-French policies, but it quickly established a militant Protestant identity. Reform was promulgated by John Knox and other fiery preachers, who helped draw up the "Book of Discipline" in 1561, calling for the state to punish sins like blasphemy and idolatry with death. The reformers also wanted to set up schools in every parish and establish a national system to support the poor. The monarch, Mary, Queen of Scots, abhorred these men, and remained a Catholic. The hapless Mary was deposed in 1567 during a civil war – she fled to England, where, after twenty years of confinement, her cousin Elizabeth I had her executed for plotting against her. The Scottish throne was transferred to Mary's infant son, King James VI, who was raised as a Protestant. Reformers hoped that the Scottish Church or Kirk would adopt a form of church government by lay elders, or presbyters (hence Presbyterianism), but once he was grown up, James refused to comply, and started to appoint new bishops. As in England, the intentions of the radical reformers were thwarted.

It would be a huge mistake to imagine that everyone in Great Britain converted rapidly and easily to Protestantism. In England, the shift was slow, was marked by several reversals, and was never total. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, the clergy were officially entirely Protestants, but zealous reformers (called Puritans by their critics) remained a minority. The new religion also spread rapidly in towns, among merchants and tradesmen. The countryside was slower to convert. After a series of rural Catholic rebellions from the 1530s to the 1560s, most of the common people of England accepted Protestantism, without great enthusiasm. Among the aristocracy and landowning classes, especially in northern England, a substantial number of Catholics (called recusants) continued to adhere to the old faith. In Wales, the process of reformation was even slower, in part because most of the common people still spoke Welsh rather than English, and the borderlands remained home to a substantial Catholic community. The Scottish Reformation was most successful in the towns and farming communities of the Lowlands. The clan-based societies of the Highlands and islands mostly stuck to the old religion. As for Ireland, the Reformation made no headway among Gaelic-speakers or "Old Irish," as they were called, and very little among the Norman-French settlers or "Old English." Clearly, Protestantism was not likely to create a basis for unity throughout the British Isles.

Elizabeth I died, childless, in 1603, and was succeeded by her cousin James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England. He was the first English King of the house of Stuart, which was how his new subjects spelled the name Stewart. From now on, England and Scotland shared the same monarch; but they were not united in any other sense. James had wanted to bring about an administrative union, combining the two systems of government, but the English and Scottish Parliaments scuttled the project. He had other quarrels with his Parliaments, particularly concerning finances; and these contributed to his negative image in the memories of the English. In contrast to the great Elizabeth, James was unfairly remembered as

a weakling with authoritarian tendencies, who dribbled when he spoke and had terrible hygiene. In fact, he was a cautious, intelligent man who had imposed royal authority on the factious Scottish nobles, while writing learned treatises in his spare time on subjects as diverse as monarchy, tobacco smoking, and witchcraft. Longing for a general settlement of religious issues in a divided Europe, he kept his kingdoms out of the brutal Thirty Years' War (1618–48). Unfortunately, his Puritan critics perceived James's peace policy as a sellout to Catholicism. James also had a weakness for handsome young men, whom he took as advisors and on whom he lavished great rewards. Whether or not he slept with them is a recurring subject for historical speculation. In any case, because of his favorites, James's court gained a terrible, and deserved, reputation for corruption.

It was under James's controversial rule that the first worldwide English empire was born. We should call it English rather than British, because the Scots were as yet excluded from English overseas trade and colonization. In south and east India, the English came to trade, not to settle or govern. The East India Company set up "factories" or trading posts in Indonesia, in Japan, and at Surat in India, within the territories of the Mughal emperor. The English merchants were challenging the Portuguese and the Dutch for control of the commerce in pepper, spices, silks, and the light Indian cotton cloth known as calico, all highly desirable commodities among the upper classes of Europe. In North America and the Caribbean, by contrast, the English came initially for gold, and later for land. Under James I, successful English colonies were founded at Jamestown, Virginia (1607), in Maine (1607), Newfoundland (1610), Bermuda (1612), and at Plymouth, Massachusetts (1621). Most of these colonies would not have survived without the help of native populations, although it soon became clear that one of their purposes was to eject native peoples and replace them with settlers.

The policy of colonization by settlement was not new. We have already seen it in the Norman-French Empire of the thirteenth century, applied to Wales, Ireland, and southern Scotland. It had been revived in the mid-sixteenth century, through the creation of "plantations" that were designed to draw new English settlers into previously "Old Irish" areas. As King of Scotland, James VI had set up similar plantations to bring Lowland colonists into the Gaelic-speaking Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetland Islands. After 1609, Lowland Scots settlers began to arrive in the northern Irish province of Ulster, the most Gaelic part of Ireland and the seat of the recent insurrection of the Irish chiefs. The Catholic "Old Irish" were dispossessed of their lands, ostensibly because they had taken part in the rebellion. The Ulster plantation gradually became a predominantly Protestant society, strongly connected to Great Britain. It has survived to this day, with disturbing consequences for Irish unity as well as for British relations with Ireland.

The Civil Wars

The political and religious tensions that were building within the British Isles erupted in the reign of James's son, Charles I. A shy, quiet, family-oriented man

who spoke with a mild stutter, Charles was confronted by three major problems at the very beginning of his reign: lack of money, religious disagreements, and a major European war. By seeking new forms of revenue, Charles irritated many of his subjects and a considerable number of Members of Parliament (MPs). By adopting a non-Calvinist, ritualistic form of Protestantism that seemed to smack of Catholicism, Charles infuriated radical reformers, meaning English Puritans as well as Scots Presbyterians. By dabbling disastrously in wars with France and Spain, Charles undermined the credibility of his government. He had an authoritarian disposition, but he always tried to stay within the boundaries of traditional kingly power. He was not a despot, and was never a Catholic. Yet many began to perceive him as both. In return, he imagined his critics as religious fanatics, bent on creating a republican government.

The result was a series of Civil Wars that overthrew the monarchy and created a short-lived English republic – so far, the only republic in English history. They began in 1637 with an uprising in Scotland, in protest against Charles's religious policies. The Scots drew up a National Covenant, a strong statement of Scotland's Protestant identity and national purpose. The uprising was soon taken over by Presbyterian Covenanters, who discarded the Scottish bishops and set about reforming the Church or Kirk. To confront them with a military force, King Charles needed money, and was compelled to call an English Parliament. When its members made demands on him, he dissolved it, but after the Scots beat him in battle, he was forced to call another. To his horror, it sided with the Scots! Deeply distrustful of the King, Parliament began to remove his control over his advisors and to treat Charles as if he were a minor or an incompetent. A reform of the English Church on Presbyterian lines appeared imminent.

The radical Protestants seemed to be victorious in both Scotland and England, which caused terrible fear in Ireland among the "Old Irish" (Gaelic) and "Old English" (Anglo-Norman) landowners. Both groups were Catholic. In November 1641, they raised a rebellion, not to overthrow the king, but to assist him against his radical Protestant antagonists. The rebels formed a Catholic Confederacy at Kilkenny that comprised the first self-proclaimed government of Ireland to be set up by the Irish themselves, at least since the old high kingship. In many respects, Irish national consciousness can be dated to the Confederacy; but as yet it existed only among the Catholic upper classes, and it did not override the longstanding ethnic conflict between the "Old Irish" and the "Old English." In the end, the latter were willing to make a settlement with Protestant royalists, while the "Old Irish," who felt they had more to lose, were not.

News of the Irish rebellion, and of massacres of Protestant settlers in Ulster by Irish peasants, inflamed the English political situation. London crowds demanded the abolition of bishops and a thorough reform of the Church. Charles I decided that he could not control the capital city; so he withdrew to the north, where he gathered military forces and, in August 1642, effectively declared war on his own Parliament. He received strong backing from moderate Protestants who were frightened by Puritanism, as well as from Catholics. In response, Parliament raised its own army and made war on the king, supposedly to bring him back to his

senses. At the prompting of their Scottish allies, Puritan MPs also did away with bishops and adopted a Presbyterian settlement for the Church of England, vesting ecclesiastical government in lay elders or presbyters. The Civil War was eventually won by Parliament, but only after the creation of a New Model Army, based on up-to-date military principles and infused with Puritan zeal. The army imprisoned Charles I in 1646. Seeking to regain his power, the King began a series of devious negotiations with the Scots Covenanters and the moderate Presbyterians who dominated the English Parliament.

The New Model Army, however, was emerging as a political force in its own right. Its generals tended to be more radical than most Parliamentary leaders. Some of the generals wanted churches to be governed by their membership (Congregationalism) rather than by presbyters. A few wanted full freedom of worship for Protestants. Among the junior officers of the Army, there was considerable sympathy for the ideas of a republican group called the Levellers, who advocated voting rights for most adult males. The common ranks of the army contained many adherents of unorthodox religious beliefs. Later, they would join sects like the Fifth Monarchists, who believed rule by the saints was at hand, or the Baptists, who practiced adult baptism, or the Society of Friends, known as Quakers, who sought a divine light in everyone. Moderate Scottish and English politicians were horrified at the prospect of an army-led religious revolution; so they conspired with the King to start a second Civil War, in order to crush the radicals. The New Model Army quickly suppressed this attempt in the summer of 1648, and the generals took charge of political affairs. They purged the moderates from government, creating what was referred to insultingly as "the Rump Parliament." The King was put on trial before the new legislature and found guilty of conspiring against his people. On January 30, 1649, King Charles I was beheaded. To many observers, then and for decades afterwards, this was the most shocking event in all of English history.

What followed was the first and only British exercise in republican government. The new Commonwealth, as it was called, was dependent from the first on the New Model Army, and on its commander, Oliver Cromwell, a serious, well intentioned and pious man who was convinced that God was on his side. Cromwell and the Army throttled the Irish rebellion, perpetrating massacres that have scarred the Irish imagination to this day. Then they turned on the Scots, smashing the Covenanting army and defeating a Scottish-backed attempt by the late King's son, Charles II, to regain the throne. Ireland and Scotland were compelled to accept republican government, and for the first time, Scotland was incorporated into an English-dominated state. Always under the shadow of the military, the Commonwealth became a government by generals in 1653, when Oliver Cromwell overthrew "the Rump" because it was turning against the army and was close to passing a restrictive settlement for the Church. Cromwell became Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, an office halfway between a king and a president. His rule was characterized by freedom of religion for Protestants (but not for Catholics) and strong military rule over the entire British Isles. Cromwell's navies hammered the Dutch at sea and seized Jamaica from the Spaniards. For godly Protestants,

this was the fulfillment of the English national dream, conceived during the Reformation and kept alive by Puritans for a century. For those who opposed Puritanism and republicanism, however, Cromwell's Protectorate was more like a nightmare.

The English republic did not long survive Lord Protector Cromwell's death in 1658. His son Richard was incapable of holding the office. Months of bickering among the generals and leaders of "the Rump" led to a *coup d'état* by General George Monck and his troops, stationed in Scotland. Monck called new elections, which he knew would result in a legislature favorable to the exiled King. Dominated by Presbyterian moderates who hated the army commanders and the sectarians, the Convention, as it was called, proclaimed Charles II in May 1660. Charles had been living in exile, and relative poverty, in France and the Dutch Republic. He came back to England with offers of peace and good will to virtually everyone, summed up in a declaration issued at Breda in Holland. His welcome home was deafeningly enthusiastic: after eleven years of unstable government, all but a determined minority of republicans wanted a monarchy again. Charles did not seek revenge against his enemies. Only a few individuals, including those who had signed his father's death warrant, were excluded from an Act of Indemnity and Oblivion that pardoned almost everything that had happened in the past twenty years. The King and his chief minister, the Earl of Clarendon, were also willing to make concessions to the Presbyterians, but the English Parliament elected in 1661 was led by old royalists who scorned such compromise. They drove out of the Church every clergyman who was not willing to swear to a renewed Act of Uniformity, upholding the old liturgy and condemning Presbyterianism. The expelled ministers and their followers – Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and others – would collectively be known as Protestant Dissenters or Nonconformists. In Scotland, where a similar ejection took place, they would retain the name of Covenanters.

Charles II gave in to repression by his Parliament because, learning from his father's mistakes, he was cautious and wary. He kept his own religious opinions private, which was a good thing as they tended towards Roman Catholicism. Charles was an easy-going, pleasure-loving man who did not like to bother himself about the everyday tasks of government. He put his trust in powerful ministers: the Earl of Lauderdale in Scotland, the Duke of Ormonde in Ireland, the Earl of Clarendon in England. If he had not had a brother – James, Duke of York – and if his brother had not decided to convert to Catholicism, Charles might be remembered as a successful monarch. Unfortunately for the King, his brother's Catholicism became known. Worse still, for all his constant fornicating outside marriage, which brought him many illegitimate children, Charles II was not able to sire heirs by his wife, the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza, meaning that his Catholic brother would eventually succeed to the throne.

That story belongs to a later chapter. For now, we can ask what sort of nations England and Scotland were in the reign of Charles II. They were still very separate, with their own Parliaments and legal systems, their own established Churches and distinct cultures. The English, however, had established a dominant position

within the British Isles with which the Scots could no longer compete. That dominance was derived not from a European empire, as in Norman times, nor even from military superiority within Britain. Increasingly, it was based on England's global importance, as a commercial center and as the hub of an empire. The empire now spread to the cod fisheries of Newfoundland, to Puritan New England and Dutch New York (the former New Netherlands, captured in 1664), to East and West Jersey (settled in the 1670s), to the tobacco colonies of Virginia and the Carolinas (chartered in 1669), to the sugar islands of Barbados and Jamaica, to Tangier in North Africa (acquired by Charles II as part of his marriage settlement), to James Fort on the Gambian coast of West Africa (where the Royal African Company was trading in slaves), to the Indian ports of Surat and Bombay (another Portuguese gift to Charles II on his marriage), and to "factories" in Java, Sumatra, South China, and Japan. The empire was bound together by the Navigation Acts (six of them in all, passed between 1651 and 1673), which stipulated that trade in the English colonies must be carried on in English ships, sailing from and to English ports. Commercial rivalries were responsible for three wars with the Dutch (1652–4, 1665–7, 1672–4), whose ships had until then carried a great deal of English colonial trade. The English did not win these wars, but the Dutch were not able to stop them either. English trade and empire continued to grow in North America, West Africa, and Asia, although not in North Africa, where Tangier, once the focus of grandiose plans for a plantation-like settlement, was abandoned in 1684.

The English in the late seventeenth century possessed a bounding self-confidence and a strong sense of national identity. Although they were bitterly divided among themselves by social, religious, and political issues, most English Protestants could subscribe to the idea of the nation's divinely appointed destiny. Protestant Scots had once shared the same view of themselves, but that self-image had been shattered by the defeat of the Covenanters and the humiliating annexation under the Protectorate. Only the most determined zealots could still believe that Scotland was intended to lead the world towards the millennium, the thousand years that would precede the end of the world. For the English, on the other hand, such an exalted view of themselves was not at all hard to accept, although after 1660 they tended to interpret God's blessings in terms of secular prosperity rather than Christian eschatology.

The period in which this book begins was a difficult one in English national history, but it was not a low point. In spite of the terrible troubles of the 1640s and 1650s, in spite of the long-term loss of a European empire, England remained a powerful nation, capable of pushing around its immediate neighbors in the British Isles, and of exerting its commercial influence on a global scale. It was already on its way towards creating the biggest empire that the world has ever seen. To understand how that happened, however, we have to know more about the land and peoples of Great Britain, on whom the wealth and success of the future empire would depend.